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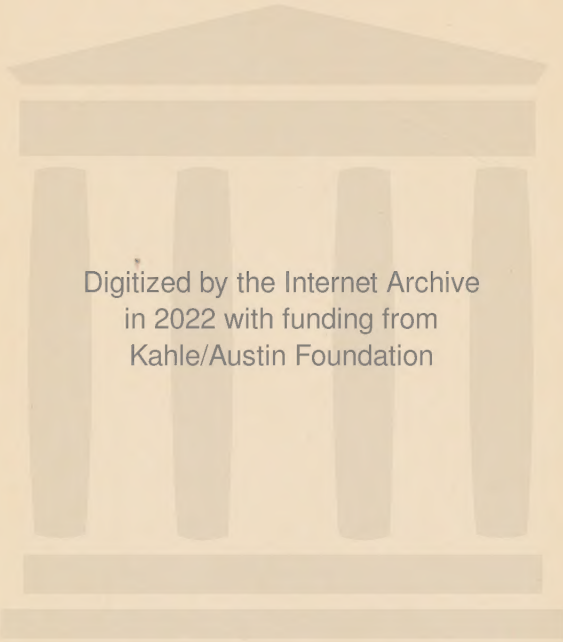
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The People Next Door

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

by Ruth Lorak

^{or}
Ruth Lorac

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THE PEOPLE NEXT DOOR

STORY OF THE PLAY

This brand-new comedy of family life is distinguished by grand characterizations, novel plot angles, fast action and any number of hilarious laugh scenes—but most of all it is distinguished by the author's shrewd and knowing approach to his typical, down-to-earth American characters—people who might be your own neighbors or friends. Take the hero (if we dare to call him that): Harry Moore. He owns a drugstore and has a family, which he rules with a hand as heavy as any dictator's. Next door lives Charley Foster, who is in the shoe business, and whose explosive temper is a match in every way for Harry's (and Harry's is legendary). These two have been having a feud for years. How it started, they themselves have forgotten; still they've never for a moment let up in their great hate. And, moreover, they insist that this hate be shared by their respective families. Thus, Dottie Moore and Pete Foster, who have conceived a Romeo-Juliet interest in each other, are forced, like Shakespeare's immortal lovers, into a sub-surface romance. They do their best to bring peace to the two clans, but to no avail. For instance, when they plant a vine in the common driveway, they succeed only in giving Harry and Charley poison ivy! Now when Charley accepts the nomination for Mayor of their little city, Harry of course immediately enters the lists on the opposing ticket. They conduct a furious campaign only to have it end in a tie vote, with the result that they must serve together as Associate-Mayors! But finally fate takes a hand—in a scene that's as mirth-provoking as anything you've ever seen—and the two families are forced to spend a whole day and night in each other's company. There is a fast and furious climax, in which the two gladiators are reconciled and the young people have their happy ending. Your group will find this happy comedy simple to produce, and with a definite and worthwhile audience appeal.

THE PEOPLE NEXT DOOR

CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

(4 Males ; 5 Females)

DOTTIE MOORE, *the elder daughter.*

EDNA MOORE, *the mother.*

SALLY MOORE, *the younger daughter.*

PETE FOSTER, *the boy next door.*

HARRY MOORE, *the father.*

CHARLEY FOSTER, *the man next door.*

KATE FOSTER, *his wife.*

GORDON DANIELS, *a visitor.*

IRENE BATES, *a city cousin.*

SYNOPSIS OF ACTS

The action of the entire play takes place in the living room of the Moore home, located in a small Mid-Western city.

ACT I: *Late afternoon of a summer day in the present year.*

ACT II: *Several days later. Evening.*

ACT III: *The following morning.*

THE PEOPLE NEXT DOOR

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS

DOTTIE is a girl of nineteen. She is quite attractive in a wholesome, natural sort of way. She has, also, a good deal of charm and poise and more than the average amount of intelligence. Her ambitions have made her vaguely dissatisfied with her present lot in life. Wears simple but becoming dresses.

EDNA is a woman of forty-two. She is short and plump, pleasant and nice-looking in a motherly sort of way—more the old-fashioned than the “modern” type. She has learned from long experience to give in to **HARRY** and to indulge his moods. Wears house dresses, usually with an apron over them.

SALLY is a girl of fifteen. She is pretty in a girlish, immature way. She is at that stage of adolescence when she is really becoming aware for the first time of the existence of the opposite sex, and is full of youthful and romantic imagination.

PETE is a young man of twenty-one. He is a nice-looking, upstanding young man, a bit on the quiet side, with nothing flashy or brilliant about him. He has, however, a fair amount of brains, a boyish smile and, on the whole, an attractive personality.

HARRY is a man of forty-five. He is of medium height, pretty stout and well-fed looking. Extremely excitable and temperamental. He believes in the old-fashioned theory that a man should be absolute

boss in his own home He's the kind who can be a hale-fellow-well-met with acquaintances, but a grouchy tyrant to his family.

CHARLEY is a man of forty-five. He is tall and solid—much taller than HARRY. But everything else that has been said of HARRY goes for him too; the two are alike in their tempers and excitability—in fact, one might say they have been cut from the same pattern.

KATE is a woman in her early forties. She is pleasant-looking, another of the old-fashioned, motherly type. She, like EDNA, has had to live for years with a legendary temper, and has made the necessary adjustments.

GORDON is a young man of twenty-five. He is tall, blonde, has a good physique and is very handsome. There is an easy, jovial distinction in his manners, and he obviously is of good family and background. Wears expensive tailored clothes, running to sport jackets and contrasting slacks.

IRENE is a girl of twenty. She is quite good-looking, and should be a contrast in general type to DOTTIE. She is affected and rather supercilious in her manner, and has a very good opinion of herself. Wears expensive and very stylish clothes.

The People Next Door

ACT ONE

THE TIME: *Late afternoon of a summer day in the present year.*

THE PLACE: *Living room of the Moore home, located in a small Mid-Western city. The room is substantial and comfortable looking, with the furniture, though somewhat worn, of a fairly good type. The main entrance is in the form of a large arch, midway of the back wall, which leads on the Left to the front door, and on the Right to a stairway to the second floor. Neither front door nor stairway, however, needs to be visible from the auditorium. French doors midway of the Left wall open on the front lawn, and a door well downstage in the Right wall leads to the kitchen and dining room. Outside the arch, against the backing is a small console table, with wall mirror above it; on this table, a telephone. Against the back wall just Right and Left of the arch, respectively, two upholstered straight chairs. Against the Left wall, upstage of French doors, a flat-top desk and straight chair; a table lamp on the desk. Against the Right wall, upstage of the door, an oblong library table; on this table, a small radio set. Stage Center, a large divan, with coffee table in front of it. In the corner down Right, an easy chair, with end-table against the upstage arm; on the end-table, a table lamp. Another easy chair, also with end-table against the upstage arm, in the corner*

down Left. Against the wall near this chair, a floor lamp. Another floor lamp against the Right wall above the table. Bookshelves are cut in the back wall, on either side of the arch; these shelves are well-stacked with volumes. Pictures, vases, ash-trays and other bric-a-brac as desired.

AT RISE: *The stage is empty for a moment; then DOTTIE enters c. from L. She is in her street clothes and carries a purse and a folded newspaper.*

DOTTIE. (*Calls as she comes in*) Yoo-hoo! Mom! (*Pulls off her hat and tosses it carelessly onto the console table; comes downstage, the newspaper in her hand*) Oh, Mom!

EDNA. (*Offstage R.*) Yes? That you, Dottie?

DOTTIE. Uh-huh!

EDNA. (*Sticks her head in through door R.*) Is it that late already?

DOTTIE. Mr. Doolittle let me off a little early, on account of the heat, and there wasn't anything doing at the office. Whew! Isn't it hot! (*Fans herself with the newspaper.*)

EDNA. You're telling me? I don't know why I picked a scorcher like today to bake a pie— (*Has a dish towel, which she touches to her brow.*)

DOTTIE. Cherry?

EDNA. (*Shakes her head*) Blueberry! (*DOTTIE makes a face*) Well, you know blueberry is your father's favorite, and we've gotta give him what he likes once in a while.

DOTTIE. Once in a while? Huh!

EDNA. I better get back to the kitchen and take a look at it, before it burns up— (*Turns and starts out R.*)

DOTTIE. Any mail for me, Mom?

EDNA. Not for you, Dottie! But I got a letter from New York, from your Cousin Irene—

DOTTIE. Irene? What does she want?

EDNA. The letter's right on the desk there. Read it for yourself. (*Exits R.*)

DOTTIE. (*Puts the newspaper down on the divan, crosses to desk, gets a letter and reads it. After a few moments, EDNA re-enters R.*) What does she want to come *here* for, Mom?

EDNA. Who? Oh, Irene! Search me! You read the letter—you know as much about it as I do.

DOTTIE. A girl from New York—with all her money and advantages—you'd think she'd go some place *interesting* on her vacation, instead of to a little hick town like Harrisville.

EDNA. Maybe she hasn't got the money.

DOTTIE. (*Puts the letter back on the desk and crosses down to divan*) Hasn't got the money? But I thought Uncle Alfred was so rich.

EDNA. Well—I guess he is. But you know how it is in New York—everybody living way beyond his income—so I suppose they thought this would be a good chance to save some money—by sending Irene here to spend the summer.

DOTTIE. Some nerve! (*Sits in divan and picks up the newspaper.*)

EDNA. Why, I thought you'd be glad to hear about her coming, Dottie—she'll be a companion for you.

DOTTIE. Uh-huh! But, from what I remember about the last time she was here, she's awfully high-hat and stuck-up.

EDNA. Oh, that was so long ago—she was just a baby, then. No doubt she's changed by now.

DOTTIE. I hope so. (*Opens the newspaper and looks at it.*)

EDNA. (*Fans herself with the dish towel*) My! Aint it a furnace in here? I think I'll open the French doors and let a little air in. (*Crosses and opens the French doors partially.*)

DOTTIE. Why don't you sit down for a while and cool off, Mom?

EDNA. I got to get back to the kitchen and finish

supper. Your Pa'll be home before you know it. (*Stands in doorway looking out*) Whew! There aint a breeze stirring.

DOTTIE. Where's Sally? I thought she was going to help with the house-work this summer.

EDNA. Search me! Probably at the movies with one of her friends. She practically lives in them.

DOTTIE. Well, I never used to be able to get away with it when I was her age.

EDNA. Yes, I'll have to ask your Pa to have a talk with her. She's certainly old enough to do her share. (*Fans herself*) What's it say in the paper, Dottie?

DOTTIE. Oh—just about the usual stuff, Mom. The President asked Congress for three billions more for defense.

EDNA. Three billions? Is that all? Is there anything in it about your Pa's campaign?

DOTTIE. I haven't seen anything, yet. (*Turns the pages*) Oh, here's something—on the last page.

EDNA. What's it say?

DOTTIE. (*Reads*) "Harry J. Moore, genial local druggist and candidate for Mayor at the forthcoming city election against Charley Foster, addressed a campaign rally at Harrisville High School last night. A packed auditorium heard Harry say that what Harrisville needs is an honest, business-man's administration, and that, if elected, he would—"

EDNA. (*Leaning out the door, suddenly calls*) Yoo-hoo! Mrs. Vandermeier! (*To DOTTIE*) There's Mrs. Vandermeier! (*Calls*) Is it hot enough for you?—Yes, it certainly is! (*To DOTTIE*) Well, land sakes alive!

DOTTIE. What's the matter?

EDNA. She's going into the Fosters' house!

DOTTIE. Mrs. Vandermeier?

EDNA. If she isn't the two-faced old cat!

DOTTIE. What's wrong with her going to see the Fosters, Mom?

EDNA. She pretends to be such a good friend of

mine—and she says all her family is voting for Harry—if that aint the limit!

DOTTIE. Well, you know—it's possible to be friendly with both the Fosters *and* us—

EDNA. No, it aint! And I don't like to hear you talking that way, Dottie—

DOTTIE. But, Mom—

EDNA. (*Firmly*) I won't have it. After everything that family has done to us—

DOTTIE. Why, what *have* they done?

EDNA. Huh? Well—oh, you know as well as I do what. And that reminds me, Dottie. Mrs. Waldo told me just this morning that you and Pete Foster were seen on the streets together—

DOTTIE. Oh—Mrs. Waldo told you that?

EDNA. She did. And I wanna know if it's true or not.

DOTTIE. Well—(*Hesitates*) Suppose Pete and I do see each other occasionally? What of it?

EDNA. (*Scandalized*) Dottie!

DOTTIE. Is there anything so wrong in that?

EDNA. What a way to be talking! You know perfectly well the Fosters are our worst enemies. They'd gladly cut our throats if they could.

DOTTIE. Pete wouldn't cut my throat—(*Smiles to herself*) I'm sure of that.

EDNA. (*Crossing to door R.*) Well, all I can say is you'd better not let your Pa hear you saying them things. And you'd better not let him find out about your seeing Pete—you know how *he* feels about it.

DOTTIE. Yes, I know. And I think it's perfectly silly. Two grown men like him and Charley Foster acting like senseless schoolboys—still carrying on about something that happened twenty years ago—something they can't even remember.

EDNA. That's enough, Dottie! I gotta get back to the kitchen, but I don't wanna hear any more about it—not another word.

DOTTIE. That's what you always say when I try to discuss it with you. Honest, Mom, you ought to be

ashamed—a sensible woman like you helping to carry on that silly old feud—

EDNA. Now, Dottie—

DOTTIE. Anyway what's it all got to do with Pete and me? Why should we have to suffer for something that doesn't even concern us?

EDNA. I said that's enough! Pete Foster may be an angel in disguise, but the mere fact that he's one of—of *that* family is enough for me, and it oughta be enough for you. And, furthermore—

SALLY. (*Enters c. from L.*) Hello, Mom!

EDNA. Oh, it's you! 'Bout time, too! Where've you been?

SALLY. I've been around—

EDNA. Not so I could notice it. Around where?

SALLY. Discussing things with my friends, sort of. You know, Mom—life and things.

EDNA. Well, I've got something to discuss with you right here, and it aint life. You should be in the kitchen right now, helping with the— (*Breaks off and stares at her*) Sally! What's that you've got on your lips?

SALLY. Oh, nothing much, Mom—nothing that would interest you.

EDNA. Oh, it wouldn't, hey? (*Crosses to her and rubs her lips vigorously with the dish towel.*)

SALLY. (*Squirming*) Mom!

EDNA. (*Holding up the towel*) Lip rouge! Sally!

(DOTTIE *shakes her head, amused, then returns to reading her paper.*)

SALLY. Gosh! Did that come off me?

EDNA. It didn't come off the man in the moon.

SALLY. Well—well, supposing it did, Mom. You mustn't forget I'm a woman now, and—

EDNA. A *woman*? You're barely fifteen.

SALLY. Fifteen can be a woman—sometimes. It all depends on the individual. And I feel like a woman. Why, sometimes, Mom—honest! Sometimes I get

feelings that would *scare* you—they actually would—

EDNA. You'd better not let your Pa find out you're using rouge, or you'll get something that'll scare you—where it'll do the most good.

SALLY. (*Shakes her head sadly*) You just don't understand about some things, Mom—you just don't.

EDNA. Maybe not. But one thing I do understand is that you're going in there right now and set the table—(*Opens door R. Sniffs*) Oh! My pie! (*Rushes out R.*)

SALLY. (*As she crosses R.*) The things you have to put up with from families! In my opinion, families ought to be abolished. (*Exits R.*)

(DOTTIE sits there reading the paper. After a moment, a low WHISTLE is heard from offstage L. She looks up, listening. The WHISTLE is repeated. She rises and crosses quickly to French doors.)

PETE. (*From offstage L.*) Dottie! Is the coast clear?

DOTTIE. Sshh! (*Looks behind her apprehensively*) Pete! You shouldn't have.

PETE. (*Comes into view through French doors*) Why, anything up?

DOTTIE. (*They talk in low tones*) You shouldn't come here like this. I just had a scene with Mom—

PETE. About—us? (*She nods*) I know; I got a dose of the same medicine. The darn gossips in this town. But, heck! I've gotta see you once in a while, Dottie—I've just gotta.

DOTTIE. I know.

PETE. We know we're right, so who cares what anyone else says?

DOTTIE. Sure—except that I have to live with my parents, Pete. And you have to live with yours.

PETE. No, we don't—we don't *have* to.

DOTTIE. Huh?

PETE. (*Leans over and takes her hand; earnestly*) Listen Dottie: I've got almost five hundred dollars saved up now, and there's a little bungalow out at

Country Club Estates that we could get with practically no down payment; I know we could—old man Donahey told me so—

DOTTIE. (*Shakes her head; firmly*) No, Pete. It can't be done.

PETE. Why not? Don't you love me?

DOTTIE. Of course I do. Silly! But, heavens! We can't even *think* of getting married yet, Pete—you know that.

PETE. No, I don't. Why can't we?

DOTTIE. Well—in the first place—our dear families would just about tear us limb from limb if we even mentioned such a thing—

PETE. Sure! So we won't mention it; we'll just go ahead and *do* it. Then, if they don't like it, they can lump it.

DOTTIE. They'll lump *us*. Can't you just see my father if I should go to him and say, "Dad, Pete Foster and I are married"? Or *your* father?

PETE. So what? The worst they can do is disown us.

DOTTIE. The *worst* they can do? Isn't that enough?

PETE. We'll still have each other, won't we?

DOTTIE. Yes, but we'll have to live in Harrisville, and it just won't be big enough to hold us *and* our families if we do a thing like that.

PETE. (*Sighs*) I guess you're right. (*Slight pause*) But what *are* we going to do, Dottie. We can't go on this way—acting like criminals—slinking around and hiding from people as though we'd done something awful. Darn it all, Dottie, we're in love with each other— (*Breaks off and looks at her*) Or are we?

DOTTIE. What do you mean by that crack?

PETE. I mean—you seem so anxious *not* to marry me—it just makes me wonder.

DOTTIE. It's just that I'm trying to be sensible about it, Pete. You want me to be sensible, don't you?

PETE. Oh—sure!

DOTTIE. As a matter of fact—even if it weren't for

our families—I don't think we should try to set up housekeeping until you're earning more money.

PETE. I earn as much now as any other clerk in Dad's stores. And most of them are married and have kids besides.

DOTTIE. That's just it, Pete. I don't want to be—just the wife of another clerk in a shoe store. Not me! (*Looks through him and off into the distance, a glowing expression on her face*) I want to amount to something—I want *you* to amount to something. You're young yet—there's no hurry. You oughtn't to tie yourself down with a family and a lot of responsibilities. Keep saving up; soon you'll have enough to branch out for yourself; there'll be plenty of time then to think about marriage.

PETE. (*Looks at her curiously*) You never talked like that before.

DOTTIE. I know, but I've been doing some thinking lately, and—well, you see—(*Moves a step away from him*) Love is a wonderful thing, Pete—but—it's not enough—

PETE. Not enough?

DOTTIE. (*Shakes her head*) You soon lose it—if you have to scrimp and save and worry—like most people do. Life isn't gay and happy, then, the way it should be, but sordid and ugly. And that's not what *I* want.

PETE. What *do* you want?

DOTTIE. (*Unhesitatingly*) Security! That's what it takes for real happiness. We can have it, too, Pete. I've got faith in you. But—let's not rush into things blindly and without thinking.

PETE. (*Slight pause; then he sighs and shakes his head*) Sometimes I think you're too darn sensible, Dottie.

DOTTIE. Maybe! (*Sighs*) Well—anyway, our first job is to make our families see reason—to end this silly fight.

PETE. Yeah, and that's turning out to be quite a job.

DOTTIE. If we could only get my father and yours to

sit down and talk things over, calmly and reasonably—

PETE. (*Shakes his head*) It would be easier to get two tomcats to be calm and reasonable than *those* two.

DOTTIE. It'll take time, but it can be done. For instance, that vine we planted in the driveway—

PETE. Got any results from that yet?

DOTTIE. No, but we will. Mom loves plants and so does your mother. They'll get to admiring it, and first thing you know, they'll be talking to each other again.

PETE. I hope you're right. This feuding business is driving me nuts. I've got to pretend to hate you and all your family worse than poison—

DOTTIE. So do I—I mean *your* family.

PETE. Uh-huh! It's the only way I can get any peace at home. And it's worse than ever, now that they're running for Mayor against each other—

DOTTIE. (*Looking out through French doors*) Pete! There's Dad now!

PETE. Gosh!

DOTTIE. You've got to go. If he sees you here, there'll be war.

PETE. All right. I'll scoot around the back. See you tonight, Dottie, at the usual place?

DOTTIE. The usual place! But hurry, Pete! (*Pushes him through French doors, trying to get rid of him.*)

PETE. So long! (*Rushes off.*)

DOTTIE. (*Closes the doors, then crosses, opens door R. and calls*) Mom, Dad's coming down the street.

EDNA. (*From off R.*) He is? All right, Dottie!

DOTTIE. I'm going upstairs and wash up. (*Crosses and exits C. to R.*)

SALLY. (*After a moment, appears at door R. Calls over her shoulder*) The table's all set now, Mom.

EDNA. (*Offstage*) All right! You better wash up, too, Sally—supper won't be long now.

SALLY. Uh-huh! (*Goes to bookshelves and takes down a book; opens the book and, from between its leaves, gets out a photograph; she looks at this photograph, sighing rapturously.*)

HARRY. (*Enters c. from L. He is dressed in street clothes and carries a briefcase and newspaper. He puts these and his hat down on console table outside arch, crosses down and peeks over SALLY's shoulder at the photograph*) What's this? (*Snatches it from her hand.*)

SALLY. Dad! Dad! Gimme that!

HARRY. (*Reads from photograph*) "Devotedly yours, Tyrone Power." Who's Tyrone Power, a friend of yours?

SALLY. You mean to say you don't *know* who he is?

HARRY. No!

SALLY. I'm certainly surprised at your ignorance, Dad. He's the greatest—the most wonderful—the—he's a movie star. Any *moron* knows that.

HARRY. Oh, is that so? Well, here's one moron who don't. (*Looks at the photograph again*) Movie trash! What're you doing with his picture?

SALLY. (*With dignity*) He and I are carrying on a correspondence—sort of.

HARRY. Oh, you are? With a slick-haired punk like this?

SALLY. (*Horried*) Dad! How *dare* you? How dare you say that about—about *Tyrone Power*? (*Whispers his name with a sort of sacred awe.*)

HARRY. That's just what he is—a slick-haired little punk with no brains. And I won't have a daughter of mine making a simpering little she-jackass of herself by writing mush-notes to some dope she's never met.

SALLY. He is *not* a dope, and I am *not* writing mush-notes to him. As I told you before, we are merely carrying on a—sort of correspondence. Is there anything wrong in that?

HARRY. You're dang tootin', there is! A baby like you—barely out of her didies—has no business carrying on a correspondence with anyone. What do you write him about—the price of tea in China?

SALLY. How can you? How can you call me a *baby*, Dad?

HARRY. I can call you lots worse than that—and I

will, if you egg me on. Now, understand me, Sally. This kind of foolishness may be all right for some people—like them blank-dang Fosters, for instance, but I won't stand for it in a daughter of mine. Got that straight?

SALLY. I will thank you to return that photograph, Dad. *(Holds out her hand.)*

HARRY. Oh, no! I'll file it— *(Tears it in half)* I'll file it right where it belongs— *(Tears it across again)* Here! *(Throws the pieces into waste-basket under desk.)*

SALLY. Oh—Dad! *(Looks speechlessly at him for a moment; then bursts into tears, turns and runs out c. to R.)*

HARRY. *(To himself)* H'mm! Dang foolishness! *(Crosses, opens door R. and calls)* Edna! You in the kitchen?

EDNA. *(Offstage R.)* Yes! That you, Harry?

HARRY. Yeah, I'm home! *(Crosses down c.)*

EDNA. *(After a moment, enters R., drying her hands on the dish towel)* Hello, Harry! Supper'll be in about ten minutes now.

HARRY. *(Looks at his watch)* That's too early. You'll have to put it off a little—

EDNA. *(Surprised)* My land! That's the first time you've ever complained about it's being early.

HARRY. We're having company for supper.

EDNA. Company?

HARRY. Uh-huh! I invited young Gordon Daniels—

EDNA. *(Dismayed)* Oh, Harry!

HARRY. He's coming for supper, and he's going to stay for a few days.

EDNA. *(Looks at him and sighs helplessly)* Who's doing all this?

HARRY. Gordon Daniels—George Daniels' son from the East. You know the George Daniels who owns the big drug chain.

EDNA. Why do we have to have him here?

HARRY. Why? For a dang good reason! A *business*

reason. His Pa and me 've got a little deal on the fire, and if it goes through—well, maybe you'll see a thing or two.

EDNA. A deal? This is the first I've ever heard of it.

HARRY. I didn't want to say anything about it till it was more definite. It aint yet, but it's liable to be if things go right between young Gordon and me.

EDNA. But, Harry—can't he stay at a hotel?

HARRY. Sure—he *can*. And I *can* pass up one of the biggest things that ever happened to me—but I'm not gonna do it. He's staying here.

EDNA. (*Hesitates a moment, then decides to make a stand; firmly*) No he's not; I just can't, Harry—I can't.

HARRY. (*Surprised at her unaccustomed assertiveness*) Huh? Can't? Why not?

EDNA. In the first place, I haven't got enough supper for an extra person tonight. And in the second place there won't be any room for him—

HARRY. There's the guest room—that's vacant.

EDNA. No, it's not. Or at least, it won't be beginning tomorrow.

HARRY. What's happening tomorrow?

EDNA. My niece, Irene Bates, is arriving to spend the rest of the summer with us.

HARRY. Oh, is that so? (*His eyes narrow dangerously*) That la-de-dah little snob is gonna spend the summer with us, hey? And if it's not too much to ask, why wasn't I informed before of this interesting little bit of information?

EDNA. Because I only got the letter today.

HARRY. Well—I don't like her. She's a stuck-up, empty-headed little snip, and I won't have her in my house. That's final.

EDNA. But, Harry! You know perfectly well I can't write her and tell her *not* to come. Even if I wanted to, she wouldn't get the letter in time. She must be on her way by now.

HARRY. Oh! So you wait till the damage is done, and

then tell me. Think you're putting one over on me, hey?

EDNA. (*With a patient sigh*) I told you I only got the letter today.

HARRY. And I suppose you had nothing to do with it? I suppose she just invited herself?

EDNA. Yes, she did. You don't think *I'd* invite her—knowing the way you feel about her?

HARRY. You know that, and yet you deliberately ask her here to make life miserable for me all summer.

(*Edna sighs*) Gordon Daniels gets the guest room, and that's final.

EDNA. But what'll I do with Irene?

HARRY. You can—

EDNA. (*Quickly*) Never mind!

HARRY. Put her in the room with the girls—and I hope she smothers.

EDNA. Three in one room?

HARRY. Three, or three hundred, I don't care. But Gordon Daniels gets the guest room. (*Between gritted teeth*) Now, listen, Edna—before I lose my temper—

EDNA. Gordon Daniels gets it!

HARRY. And if you don't want a terrible murder around here, you'll keep that snooty little fancypants out of my way—

EDNA. All right, all right! She'll probably be tickled to death to stay out of your way—if she can.

HARRY. H'mm! (*Crosses to console table and gets his briefcase*) Dottie home yet?

EDNA. Yes, she's upstairs, washing up.

HARRY. I've got something to say to her. (*At arch, calls*) Dottie!

DOTTIE. (*From offstage*) What do you want, Dad?

HARRY. Come down here a minute, will you?

DOTTIE. (*Offstage*) All right!

(*HARRY crosses down, sits in divan and puts briefcase on coffee table.*)

EDNA. (*Crosses R.*) How I'm going to stretch out

supper to take care of another person I'm sure I don't know.

HARRY. Maybe you'd like me to go without. Is that what you're suggesting?

EDNA. (*Looks at him, shakes her head*) Heaven help the people of Harrisville if you're elected Mayor. (*Exits R.*)

HARRY. (*Mumbles to himself*) Gratitude for you! Can't even get a little loyalty in my own home! (*Leans over, unstraps his briefcase and gets several folded sheets of paper from it. Unfolds the papers and begins to read*) "Fellow citizens of the noble city of Harrisville. As I look out upon your shining faces this evening—" (*Breaks off and shakes his head*) That stinks. Who ever heard of shining faces? I'll have to change it. "As I look out upon your faces this evening—"

DOTTIE. (*Enters c. from R.*) What did you want, Dad?

HARRY. Huh? Oh—c'mere and sit down, Dottie.

DOTTIE. (*Crossing to him*) Isn't supper about ready?

HARRY. Nope! Won't be for a while yet. (*She sits in divan*) H'mm! Ever think about getting married, Dottie?

DOTTIE. (*Surprised*) Why—Dad!

HARRY. Don't sit there trying to look as though you'd never heard of such a thing. Girls do get married, you know.

DOTTIE. Of course I've *thought* of it, Dad. What girl hasn't? But I don't think I will—not for quite a while yet, anyway.

HARRY. H'mm!

DOTTIE. Any particular reason for asking?

HARRY. 'Course not! Does there always have to be a reason? Only—I wanted to tell you that we're gonna have some company for a few days.

DOTTIE. Who? Anyone I know, Dad?

HARRY. Nope, you don't know him. But he's a young man—a nice young man by the name of Gordon Daniels.

DOTTIE. When's he coming?

HARRY. Right away; he'll be here for supper.

DOTTIE. F'heavens sakes! Gosh, that's *awful*, Dad. Irene Bates is coming tomorrow and—

HARRY. (*Quickly*) Never mind! I just been all through that with your Ma, and I don't want you telling me who I can or can't invite to my own house.

DOTTIE. (*Shrugs*) It's no skin off my teeth. You can invite the whole Russian army as far as I'm concerned.

HARRY. Okay! I invited him. And you be nice to him, Dottie.

DOTTIE. What do you mean by that?

HARRY. Just what I said. You be nice to him.

DOTTIE. Why?

HARRY. Because, dang it, I'm asking you to. Aint that reason enough?

DOTTIE. I have to hate whom you hate, like whom you like—

HARRY. I'm not asking you to like him— (*His voice rising*) I'm asking you to be nice to him, and you'll do it, by the blankety-blank horned toad, or I'll know the reason why.

DOTTIE. All right, all *right!* Calm down, Dad, f'heavens' sakes! Don't get so excited.

HARRY. I'm not excited—*yet*.

DOTTIE. I didn't say I *wouldn't* be nice to him. Except that I've got a date tonight, and I expect to be pretty busy the next few days.

HARRY. Date? Who with?

DOTTIE. Whv—uh—nobody you know.

HARRY. Well, break it. That's the least you can do—to help me with a big business deal like this—with a millionaire's son—

DOTTIE. Is he a *millionaire's* son, Dad?

HARRY. Sure! Practically. Them Daniels are just about rolling in dough—

DOTTIE. Really? Well—why didn't you tell me it was a business deal, Dad? Of course, I'll be very glad to do anything I can to help.

HARRY. (*Mollified*) Well—you just be nice to him.

DOTTIE. You say he's coming for supper?

HARRY. Yep! Ought to be here any time now.

DOTTIE. Heavens! (*Rises*) I'll have to change. He can't see me looking like this.

HARRY. What's the matter with that?

DOTTIE. Oh, this is just an old rag that I wear to business. You don't want him to think I'm a *pauper*? (*Hurries across to arch*) Excuse me, Dad.

HARRY. Sure! (*DOTTIE hurries out c. to R. He rises, the speech in his hand and reads from it, while pacing the floor*) "As I look out at your—uh—faces—I am sure you will elect me Mayor of Harrisville instead of that two-timing opponent of mine, Charley Foster—" (*Breaks off*) No, that aint strong enough. (*Gets a pencil and makes a correction in speech. Reads*) "Instead of that rat-faced, two-timing opponent of mine—" (*Makes another correction. Reads*) "Instead of that no-good, slimy, sneaking—" (*EDNA enters R.*) "Wife-beating, dog-kicking, rat-faced, two-timing opponent of mine, Charley Foster!" You think that's strong enough, Edna?

EDNA. It's pretty strong.

HARRY. I'll fix it up later. I want them to get a vague idea of what I think of him.

EDNA. Uh-huh! Well, I got supper simmering on the stove. If your friend don't get here soon, there'll be nothing left of it.

HARRY. Aint you gonna change?

EDNA. Change? No. What's the matter with this?

HARRY. You want him to think we're *paupers*?

EDNA. My land! You getting ashamed of me now, Harry?

HARRY. No, but I just don't want him to think we're paupers, that's all.

EDNA. All right; if you want me to change, I guess I'll have to change— (*Starts for arch.*)

(There is a COMMOTION and excited voices from off L.)

HARRY. What the—!

CHARLEY. *(Offstage)* Let me get in there! Let me at him!

EDNA. It's Charley Foster!

HARRY. Let me at him! *(Starts for French doors.)*

EDNA. Now, Harry! *(Grabs hold of his arm and keeps him back.)*

CHARLEY. Let go of me, Kate!

(French doors fly open, and he breaks in with KATE hanging onto his arm.)

KATE. Charley! Will you be careful?

CHARLEY. Careful, nothing! I'm gonna tell this cheap little soda-jerk what I think of him once and for all—

HARRY. *(To EDNA)* Did you see that? He broke into my house—

EDNA. Harry!

HARRY. Like a thief—and that's the way I'm gonna treat him! *(Strains against EDNA's hold.)*

CHARLEY. Will you let go of me, Kate, so I can give him what's coming to him—?

KATE. Remember your blood pressure! *(Hangs on to him.)*

CHARLEY. Blood pressure be hanged!

(All of these speeches are read very rapidly, coming on top of each other.)

HARRY. *(To EDNA)* You better tell him to get out of here, before I lose my temper—

CHARLEY. Hiding behind a woman's skirts!

HARRY. Did you hear that, Edna? That's the limit!

CHARLEY. Let me at him! Just let me at him!

(The MEN strain to break loose—but not too hard.)

EDNA. Harry!

KATE. Charley!

EDNA. Stop that! Stop acting like a child—

KATE. Can't you be sensible about this—

CHARLEY. After what he did to me, you want me to be sensible?

HARRY. (*To EDNA*) Tell him I don't know what I did to him, but whatever it is, it's nothing to what I'm *gonna* do to him.

CHARLEY. (*To KATE*) Ask him, him and who else?

HARRY. Tell him I don't need any help—

CHARLEY. Tell him, I'm ready any time he is—

KATE. Charley!

EDNA. Harry!

HARRY. Ask him what it is I did to him that's so terrible.

CHARLEY. Tell him he knows all-fired well what he did—the skunk!

HARRY. Tell him a skunk would be ashamed to be seen next to him, and tell him I don't know.

DOTTIE. (*Enters c. from R. She has a dressing gown wrapped around her and wears slippers*) F'heavens sakes! What's going on here?

EDNA. It's your father—and our dear neighbor. They're acting like a pair of stupid schoolboys—

DOTTIE. What's the matter?

KATE. It's that vine you people planted out in the driveway—

CHARLEY. The dod-blasted thing!

DOTTIE. The vine—?

PETE. (*Runs in through French doors*) Dad—what are you doing in here?

CHARLEY. I haven't done anything yet—but believe me, I'm going to—and plenty!

HARRY. (*To EDNA*) Tell that coward to stop talking and come outside, and I'll show him.

CHARLEY. Oh, so he calls me a coward, does he—?

PETE. Dad!

DOTTIE. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves—both of you!

(She and PETE get between them.)

PETE. You certainly should.

DOTTIE. What about the vine, Mom?

CHARLEY. What about it? You planted it right in the middle of the driveway, and you did it on purpose.

DOTTIE. Of course I did. I thought you'd like it.

CHARLEY. *Like it?* I scraped the paint off both my fenders on the dang thing!

DOTTIE. Oh—I'm sorry—

CHARLEY. Huh! I ruin a brand new car, and she says she's sorry. I bet you did it on purpose—and I bet your old man put you up to it.

PETE. That's not true, Dad. Mr. Moore had nothing to do with it. It was strictly our idea—

CHARLEY. *Our* idea?

PETE. *(Confused)* I mean—uh—um—Dottie's idea—

HARRY. *(To EDNA)* Tell him it's not our fault if he's such a rotten driver and runs into our vines—

CHARLEY. *(To KATE)* Tell him Eddie Rickenbacker couldn't have missed that vine. And tell him it's not going to happen again, because I'm gonna pull that dod-blasted thing right out of there! *(Stalks out through French doors.)*

HARRY. Destroying my property, hey? He'll do it over my dead body. *(Exits after him.)*

EDNA. My land! They're gonna have a fight—

KATE. Pete, you go out there and stop your Pa before he tears Mr. Moore limb from limb.

EDNA. Huh! It's his own limbs you'd better worry about—not Harry's.

(PETE exits through French doors.)

KATE. Of course all this wouldn't have happened if

you'd asked our permission before planting that vine in the driveway.

EDNA. It's our driveway just as much as yours, and Dottie planted it on *our* side—

KATE. She did nothing of the kind—it's half on our side—

DOTTIE. Oh, Mom! You, too? Look— (*Points out through French doors*) Look what they're doing!

EDNA. My land!

KATE. I don't blame Charley—not one bit; he's got a perfect right to tear it out. You planted it there out of spite, trying to make us ruin our car, and now it's happened.

DOTTIE. And I thought it would bring them *together*!

CHARLEY. (*Re-enters through French doors; his clothes are dishevelled and he is trailing part of a vine behind him. Triumphantly*) I got it! (*Holds up vine.*)

HARRY. (*Re-enters followed by PETE. His clothes are also disarranged, and he, too, has a part of the vine*) I saved this much from that vandal—

DOTTIE. Oh—oh! My beautiful vine!

HARRY. Yeah, our beautiful vine!

PETE. I can't tell you how sorry I am, Dottie.

CHARLEY. What've you got to be sorry for? (*To others*) He's not sorry at all. He rescinds that.

DOTTIE. Of all the stupid, childish moronic tricks, this is it! Tearing up a lovely plant like that—

HARRY. That's right; give him Hail Columbia, Dottie. He's got it coming—

DOTTIE. (*Turns on him*) And you! You're just as bad as he is, Dad—

HARRY. *Me?*

DOTTIE. (*With an almost tearful anger*) To think that a grown man like you would—

CHARLEY. (*Grins*) That's right—let him have it.

DOTTIE. (*Turns and snaps at him*) Quiet! (*To HARRY*) Would behave the way you have and—

GORDON. (*Enters through French doors. Carries a suitcase*) Hello—

DOTTIE. We don't want any! (*To HARRY*) And make such a holy show of yourself—

GORDON. But—I beg your pardon—

DOTTIE. We don't want any. Whatever you're selling, we don't want any. (*To HARRY*) I'm ashamed of you, Dad—

GORDON. But—I'm not selling anything—

DOTTIE. What—?

HARRY. Hey! He's not selling anything. Gordon!

GORDON. How are you, Mr. Moore?

HARRY. This is Gordon Daniels, Dottie—

GORDON. (*With an easy smile*) How do you do?

DOTTIE. Oh—oh, f'heavens sakes! (*Turns and runs out C. to R.*)

GORDON. (*Puzzled*) Did I do something?

HARRY. No, no! It's just that you caught her without her clothes on—I mean her fancy clothes.

GORDON. I see.

HARRY. Well—how are you, boy? I'm tickled to death to see you again. Oh, I guess you don't know my wife. This is Gordon Daniels, Edna—George Daniels' boy.

EDNA. How do you do, Mr. Daniels? I'm so glad you're going to stay with us.

GORDON. Thanks, Mrs. Moore. I'm glad too. (*Looks inquiringly at the OTHERS*) Some friends of yours?

HARRY. *Them?* I should say not. They're no friends of mine.

CHARLEY. What are we standing around here for?

KATE. I don't know—

CHARLEY. I need some air. The atmosphere in here aint so good. Come on!

(*Ushers KATE and PETE out through French doors.*)

HARRY. I'm sorry you had to bump into that poor white trash that lives next door. They've probably spoiled your whole visit.

GORDON. (*Laughs*) No, I don't think so.

HARRY. Don't stand there holding that suitcase, boy.

Here, give it to me and make yourself right at home.

GORDON. Thanks! (*Hands the suitcase to HARRY.*)

HARRY. Your hat, too. (*Takes it and places it on console table. Puts suitcase on floor outside arch*) Edna, how about supper? It's getting late, and I guess we're all hungry.

EDNA. Well, I can have it ready any time now. So, if you'll excuse me, Mr. Daniels, I'll go see about it. (*Crosses R.*)

GORDON. Certainly!

(EDNA *exits R.*)

HARRY. (*Straightening his clothes*) Lookit this! That blankety-blank so-and-so tore my shirt. Mind if I go upstairs and change, boy?

GORDON. No, no—of course not, Mr. Moore.

HARRY. (*Picks up newspaper from divan*) Here—you sit right here and look over the news, and I won't be but a jiffy.

GORDON. (*Sits in divan*) That's all right—take your time.

HARRY. I'll sue him—so help me I will. Trespassing on my grounds, destroying my property—tearing my shirt. I'll sue him. (*Exits C. to R.*)

GORDON. (*Smiles; then starts looking at the newspaper. After a few moments, SALLY enters C. from R.*) Oh—hello! (*Gets to his feet.*)

SALLY. (*Looks him over curiously*) Hello!

GORDON. I don't think we've been introduced. I'm Gordon Daniels.

SALLY. Huh?

GORDON. You've made quite a quick change, haven't you?

SALLY. Quick change—? (*Pleased as it dawns on her*) Goodness! Did you think I was Dottie?

GORDON. Oh, aren't you?

SALLY. Silly! (*Giggles*) Of course not! Dotties much older—she's really *old*—she's nineteen.

GORDON. (*Smiles*) Oh, I see—ready for the Old Folks Home, eh?

SALLY. I'm Sally.

GORDON. How do you do, Sally? And I'm sorry. You see, your father never told me there were two.

SALLY. I know. (*With a little bitterness*) That's the injustice of having an older sister. Half the time, they even forget you're alive.

GORDON. (*Gallantly*) I'm sure no one could forget you're alive.

SALLY. (*Looks at him and breaks into a giggle*) You're funny!

GORDON. Am I? Well—shall we sit down?

SALLY. Uh-huh! (*He waits until she sits in a chair, then sits next to her. She regards him with mounting interest*) What are you doing here?

GORDON. Why—your father was kind enough to invite me to stay for a few days.

SALLY. To stay *here*?

GORDON. Yes—any objections?

SALLY. Goodness, no! It's all right with me—I guess.

GORDON. Thanks very much!

SALLY. (*A slight pause, during which she continues to survey him. Suddenly*) Do you believe in romance?

GORDON. (*Startled*) Oh—uh—romance?

SALLY. Yes, you know like when a man and a woman meet and they discover that they are meant for each other, even though they come from two entirely different stations in life. That's what happened to Tyrone Power in "Conquering Love." Well—you know what romance is, don't you?

GORDON. Why—um— (*Coughs*) Yes, I know.

SALLY. Do you believe in it?

GORDON. I suppose I do—under certain circumstances.

SALLY. (*Nods*) So do I—under certain circumstances. But the woman was awful. She wasn't worthy of him at all, I didn't think. (*GORDON looks puzzled*) Tyrone Power, I mean.

GORDON. Oh, I see.

SALLY. Do you believe in it even when they're from different stations in life?

GORDON. I think so.

SALLY. Well—what station of life are you from?

GORDON. Oh—ah— (*Coughs*) I'm in business.

SALLY. Business? Well— (*A bit disappointed*) Well, I think business can be awfully romantic—sometimes. Don't you?

GORDON. (*Smiles*) Not the business I'm in. It's anything but romantic.

SALLY. Oh! Well—well, look, Mr.— Goodness, I don't remember your name.

GORDON. You can call me Gordon.

SALLY. All right, Gordon. Well—what I wanted to ask you is— Do you think fifteen is too young to be a woman?

GORDON. Why—no, I don't think so—not under certain circumstances.

SALLY. I don't, either—under certain circumstances. Some people just mature younger than others—that's what Mom doesn't understand.

GORDON. Oh—doesn't she?

SALLY. (*Shakes her head*) She thinks I'm still a baby, or something. She doesn't realize that I'm just as much a woman as she is.

GORDON. Oh, now—I'd hardly say that.

SALLY. You would if you felt the things inside you that *I* feel.

GORDON. Oh!

SALLY. Gordon—do you think that two people could meet like—well, we did—and if they felt a great undying love for each other—would they know it right away?

GORDON. Why—ah—maybe.

SALLY. I mean—would they know it the first five minutes?

GORDON. They might; but it's—well—hard to say, you know— (*DOTTIE enters C. from R.; she is all toggled out in what is obviously her best dress. He jumps*

to his feet, glad of the interruption. She crosses to him and extends her hand) Ah! Back again, eh?

DOTTIE. I'm Dottie.

GORDON. Yes, I know.

DOTTIE. I want to apologize, Mr. Daniels, for running out the way I did before.

GORDON. That's all right.

DOTTIE. Family squabbles are awful things, don't you think? What must you think of us?

SALLY. Dottie—if you don't mind—you interrupted us.

DOTTIE. Interrupted—you?

SALLY. Yes, Gordon and I were just having a very interesting discussion about—life and things.

DOTTIE. Oh, really? Well—look, dear, I think Mom wants you in the kitchen.

SALLY. No she doesn't—

DOTTIE. Yes, I'm sure she does. (*Lifts her out of divan.*)

SALLY. But—

DOTTIE. Now, don't argue, dear. Run along. We don't want to keep Mr. Daniels waiting for his supper, do we? (*Gives her a shove toward R.*)

SALLY. (*Pouting*) You see what I meant before about older sisters, Gordon? There ought to be a law against them. (*Exits R.*)

GORDON. (*Laughs*) Poor Sally!

DOTTIE. She's at the awful age now—between little girl and grown up—when she doesn't know just what to make of things.

GORDON. She knows what to make of *some* things.

DOTTIE. I hope she hasn't been annoying you too much.

GORDON. No, no! Certainly not.

DOTTIE. Shall we sit down?

GORDON. Thanks!

(*They sit in divan together.*)

DOTTIE. What do you think of Harrisville? I suppose you must find it awfully dull after the East.

GORDON. I haven't had a chance yet to find out one way or the other. Just got in today, you know.

DOTTIE. Well, it is dull. You can take it from me.

GORDON. That so? I sort of had an idea it might be fun— (*Flashes a smile*) With the proper company, of course.

DOTTIE. Oh! (*Drops her gaze demurely.*)

GORDON. But—I suppose I shouldn't pursue that angle. It wouldn't be fair.

DOTTIE. Why not?

GORDON. Oh, I'm sure you must be all tied up. Boy-friend and all that, eh?

DOTTIE. (*Hesitates momentarily*) No. That is—nothing serious.

GORDON. No? Then the boys in Harrisville must be very stupid. Would you like to take on the job of showing me the sights?

DOTTIE. Why— (*Smiles coquetishly*) I'd be glad to.

GORDON. Good! In that case, I'm sure I *shan't* find it dull—

CHARLEY. (*Bursts in through French doors; his two hands are swathed in bandages. He is followed in by KATE*) Where is he? Where's that good-for-nothing little jerk of a father of yours?

(DOTTIE and GORDON rise.)

KATE. Now, Charley—!

DOTTIE. You back again, Mr. Foster?

(*WARN Curtain.*)

CHARLEY. You're darn tootin', I'm back again! Where is he—just tell me where he is, that's all!

DOTTIE. Why—what's the mater?

CHARLEY. What's the *matter*? Look at me—just look at me! (*Extends his hands.*)

HARRY. (*Enters c. from R.*) What's up—? Oh—that trespasser is in again, hey?

CHARLEY. (*Breaks away from KATE. Rushes across to HARRY, his hands up in a fighting posture*) Come on and fight—like a man!

HARRY. (*Scratching the back of his hand*) Dottie—you tell him I don't fight with cripples.

CHARLEY. It's your own dang fault if I am a cripple—yours!

EDNA. (*Enters R. with SALLY*) My land! What is it?

DOTTIE. Mr. Foster, what's the matter with your hands?

CHARLEY. What's the matter? *What's the matter?* I got poison ivy!

DOTTIE. *Poison ivy?*

CHARLEY. Yes, poison ivy!

DOTTIE. But—how did you get it?

CHARLEY. You know dang well how I got it! It was a dang blasted plot, that's what it was—and that little squirt put you up to it. I got it from that blankety-dang vine out there!

(HARRY laughs, scratches his hands.)

EDNA. My land!

DOTTIE. F'heavens sakes! Is *that* what that plant was?

EDNA. (*As HARRY continues to scratch*) Harry, what's that you've got on your hand?

HARRY. Huh? (*Looks at his hands*) Well, I'll be—!

EDNA. (*Examining him*) He's got poison ivy, too!

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT TWO

THE TIME: *Several days later. Evening.*

THE PLACE: *The same.*

AT RISE: SALLY and GORDON are discovered seated on divan together.

SALLY. "No, no! I will never let you go—never! You cannot escape me, no matter how hard you may try. I will make you mine, mine!"

GORDON. Then what did she say?

SALLY. Huh? Oh, I don't know. I wasn't paying any attention to *her*. But Tyrone Power was wonderful. Those big, soulful eyes of his. Goodness! (*Sighs ecstatically.*)

GORDON. (*With a smile*) So you think he's pretty hot stuff, eh?

SALLY. Oh, sure—as a movie star. But he's not the type I'd pick for myself.

GORDON. What type would you pick, Sally?

SALLY. Well, he'd be tall and strong—blonde hair and blue eyes— (*Change to suit description of actor playing GORDON.*)

GORDON. (*Laughs*) Oh, I see!

SALLY. (*Suddenly*) Gordon, were you ever in love?

GORDON. Why—yes. Yes, I guess everybody is sometime or other in his life, eh?

SALLY. (*Breathlessly*) Are you in love *now*?

GORDON. Now? Well, don't you think that's a leading question?

SALLY. All right. Then just tell me—yes or no—if you're in love with my cousin Irene.

GORDON. What makes you think that?

SALLY. Well—you been acting kind of mushy-like since she's been here, and I know she's just crazy about you—

GORDON. Oh, now—

SALLY. It's the truth. Haven't you noticed how chilly she and my sister Dottie've been to each other?

GORDON. What's that got to do with it?

SALLY. (*Looks at him for a moment*) Don't you know?

GORDON. No.

SALLY. Goodness, you're naive. I'll have to tell you, then. They're having an *awful* battle over you.

GORDON. (*Grimaces*) You're exaggerating.

SALLY. No, I'm not at all. Another *woman* can always tell about such things. But I been hoping.

GORDON. Hoping?

SALLY. (*Nods*) Hoping you got enough sense so you can tell they're not good enough for you—not either of them. You deserve someone better than Irene or Dottie.

GORDON. (*With an indulgent smile*) Who, for instance?

SALLY. Well—for instance—someone not as *old* as they are. Someone young and—and *sincere* and capable of a real feeling for you, and— (*TELEPHONE rings*) Goodness! I guess I'll have to answer it. Excuse me, please?

GORDON. (*Rises*) Of course.

SALLY. (*Rises, crosses and answers telephone*) Hello— No, he's not here— I don't know—he's out seeing about the election, or something—

EDNA. (*Enters R. She is drying her hands on a dish-towel*) Was that the phone, Sally—? Oh, you are answering it.

SALLY. (*In telephone*) All right, I'll tell him—A hundred and fifteen votes— Eighth ward?—Yes— Yes, I will—You're welcome—goodbye. (*Hangs up.*)

EDNA. Who was it?

SALLY. The man from Election Headquarters—Mr. Nooney. He wanted Dad.

EDNA. Your father? But he is at Headquarters.

SALLY. No, Mr. Nooney said he left a few minutes ago. And he said to tell Dad the late returns just came in—for everything but the Eighth Ward, and Dad is leading by a hundred and fifteen votes.

EDNA. My land! That means he'll probably be elected.

SALLY. (*Uninterestedly*) Does it? (*Crosses back down*) Now, as I was saying, Gordon—

EDNA. Whatever you were saying, it can wait. Here—(*Holds the dish-towel out to her*) You get in the kitchen and finish drying the dishes.

SALLY. But, Mom—I can't. Gordon and I were just having a very important discussion.

EDNA. It aint as important as getting them dishes done. Go on, now, Sally—(*Thrusts the towel into her hand, takes her arm and turns her toward door R.*) You're not a little girl any more, you know.

SALLY. You're telling me! (*Pouts and exits R.*)

EDNA. That girl! It's like pulling teeth to get her to do her share around the house.

GORDON. Well, looks as though Mr. Moore were going to be the new Mayor, eh?

EDNA. Yes—I guess it does.

GORDON. You don't seem over-enthusiastic at the prospect.

EDNA. I'm not. I don't think Harry has got exactly the right temperament to make a good Mayor.

GORDON. (*Smiles*) I think I see what you mean.

EDNA. He should have let well enough alone, instead of going out and looking for more trouble.

GORDON. What made him decide to run for Mayor in the first place?

EDNA. Charley Foster.

GORDON. Oh, your neighbor?

EDNA. Uh-huh! When he came out as a candidate, Harry said he'd have to save the people of Harrisville from a fate worse than death and run himself.

GORDON. (*Laughs*) I see. Well, that's a good reason.

EDNA. Anything to spite Charley Foster. But I'm worried. Suppose he's elected, and someone comes to him and tries to tell him how to run the city. Can you imagine what'll happen?

GORDON. Not very well.

EDNA. We'll probably have to move out of town before it's over. (*Sighs*) Where's Dottie? Did she go upstairs?

GORDON. Yes, I think she did, Mrs. Moore.

EDNA. I don't know what's getting into her lately.

GORDON. Why, what do you mean?

EDNA. Haven't you noticed? She's been acting mighty peculiar—mooning around about something or other. If I didn't know better, I'd say she was in love. I wonder what it could be.

GORDON. I wonder—

IRENE. (*Enters c. from L.*) Good evening, Aunt Edna. Good evening, Gordon.

EDNA. Well, Irene! I was worrying about you. You missed supper.

IRENE. That's all right. I had a bite downtown.

EDNA. Oh! Was the show good?

IRENE. Swell! That is, one of the features was. The other, not so hot. But as usual, the one I wanted to see was last. That's what kept me so long. Too bad you couldn't have come along, Gordon.

GORDON. Yes, it is. But business, you know—

IRENE. (*Playfully*) You great big important man of affairs! (*They laugh*) Where's dear Cousin Dottie, Aunt Edna?

EDNA. Upstairs, I guess, Irene. She went up right after supper.

IRENE. Oh, that's too bad. Has she got a headache, or something?

EDNA. I don't know.

IRENE. I just saw a late bulletin at the *Star* office. Uncle Harry is leading.

EDNA. Yes, so they say.

IRENE. Looks as though you would be the First Lady of Harrisville. Congratulations, Aunt Edna!

EDNA. Thanks, Irene! Well, I'd better go upstairs and get into something decent for a change. There'll probably be people over later if Harry does win it. (*Crosses to arch*) Irene, don't you let Sally out of the kitchen till she finishes drying them dishes.

IRENE. I won't.

EDNA. Excuse me! (*Exits C. to R.*)

IRENE. (*Patronizingly*) Dear Aunt Edna! She's so quaint, isn't she?

GORDON. Quaint?

IRENE. (*Crossing to divan*) Yes, in a provincial sort of way, you know. (*Sits*) Come here and sit with me, Gordon. (*GORDON crosses and sits in divan with her*) They all are. Fancy Uncle Harry getting himself all worked up about being Mayor of some insignificant place like Harrisville.

GORDON. Maybe he doesn't find it so insignificant.

IRENE. Well, of course, it's educational to get out to the great open spaces once in a while, as dear Mama says, and find out how the other half lives. But it gets deadly dull, doesn't it?

GORDON. Oh, I don't know.

IRENE. (*Slight pause*) What's the matter, Gordon?

GORDON. Matter?

IRENE. Don't you like me?

GORDON. Why—yes, of course I do, Irene. What made you ask that?

IRENE. Well— You've been acting very indifferent, you know.

GORDON. (*Politely*) Really? Funny, I hadn't meant to.

IRENE. (*Confidently*) Men usually aren't indifferent to me.

GORDON. No, I can understand that.

IRENE. But perhaps that's just your way with all girls. Is it?

GORDON. (*Smiles*) You see, I haven't any "way" at all. I just take things as they come, more or less.

IRENE. You interest me strangely. I always like things that are hard to get. If you had fallen all over yourself trying to make an impression on me, I probably shouldn't have bothered at all.

GORDON. Then I suppose I should be glad I didn't.

IRENE. Seriously, I think we have a lot in common.

GORDON. What?

IRENE. Well, for one thing, we're the only civilized people in this place.

GORDON. You aren't very charitable to your relatives, are you?

IRENE. Charity isn't my long suit.

GORDON. What is?

IRENE. You'll never find out if you don't make an attempt.

GORDON. I'm willing. Any suggestions?

IRENE. Jack Carver and his orchestra is playing a one-night stand at Bridgebury.

GORDON. Bridgebury? That's pretty far, isn't it?

IRENE. Only twenty miles. And I haven't heard any good music since I left New York. But, of course, if you don't want to go, don't let me change your mind.

GORDON. I'd like to go very much. But I'll have to warn you. I'm not much as a dancer.

IRENE. (*Looks him over and smiles*) I'll take my chances.

GORDON. It's on your own head. Shall we ask Dottie?

IRENE. (*Makes a face*) I don't like threesomes. They're never any fun.

GORDON. But she is our hostess, you know.

IRENE. And she's also a little country hick. She may have a heart of gold, but I bet she doesn't know a rhumba from last Sunday's newspaper. No, let's not, Gordon. Or if you want to ask her, you can leave me out.

GORDON. It's your suggestion. I guess we go alone.

IRENE. Fine! We'll have fun, won't we?

GORDON. I'm sure we shall.

IRENE. (*Rises*) Do you think I look all right like this?

GORDON. (*Rises*) Perfect!

IRENE. Flatterer! I'll just put some warpaint on and be with you before you know it.

GORDON. Right!

DOTTIE. (*Enters c. from R.*) Hello!

IRENE. Dottie dear! Are you feeling all right?

DOTTIE. (*Looks a bit on the tragic side*) Uh-huh! How was the show, Irene?

IRENE. Fine, dear! Is your headache very bad?

DOTTIE. Oh—I haven't got a headache—not exactly.

IRENE. Haven't you? I thought you had. But I must rush. Gordon has kindly asked me to go to the dance at Bridgebury with him.

DOTTIE. Oh, really? (*Looks unhappily from one to the other*) Well—I'm sure you'll have a good time. I—sort of wish I was going myself.

GORDON. (*Uneasily*) Uh—well—if you'd really like to, Dottie—

IRENE. (*Quickly*) Perhaps some other time, dear.

DOTTIE. Uh-huh—perhaps!

IRENE. I shan't keep you long, Gordon. (*Turns and exits c. to R.*)

DOTTIE. (*Sighs despondently*) Well, I—I certainly hope you like the dance, Gordon.

GORDON. Thanks! I'm not expecting to too much. It was Irene's idea, you know.

DOTTIE. Was it? (*Crosses to French doors, stands looking out*) Irene's just full of ideas, isn't she?

GORDON. Yes, never at a loss.

DOTTIE. Uh-huh! (*Sighs*) She's really a very lovely girl, isn't she?

GORDON. Uh—Yes, she is.

DOTTIE. That's what I think. (*Crosses down and sits in chair down L.*)

GORDON. (*After an uncomfortable little pause; crosses down so he is on a line with her*) Look, Dottie, about that sightseeing we were going to do—

DOTTIE. Yes?

GORDON. We haven't seemed to get around to it, have we? But the fact is, I've been busy.

DOTTIE. I know.

GORDON. Your father can testify to that fact, and what I've been doing may possibly mean a good deal to both him and me.

DOTTIE. It's all right, Gordon. You don't have to explain. I know you've been busy.

GORDON. I just wanted you to know that it hasn't been a matter of choice that's kept us apart.

DOTTIE. Uh-huh! (*Decides to get in a little dig*) I suppose Cousin Irene just knocked you over the head and made you say you'd take her to Bridgebury tonight.

GORDON. (*Grins wryly*) Not quite! But, you see, Dottie—

DOTTIE. Please! I assure you it doesn't make any difference to me, Gordon, whether you go to Bridgebury or not—not the slightest.

GORDON. Doesn't it?

DOTTIE. No, and I hope you don't think that it does.

GORDON. Well—Sally said something a little while ago that made me wonder.

DOTTIE. Sally? What did she say?

GORDON. (*Hesitates momentarily*) I wouldn't say anything about this, except that I think it ought to be cleared up—for both our sakes. She intimated that—well, that you were jealous of Irene and me.

DOTTIE. (*With too much emphasis*) F'heavens' sakes!

GORDON. Of course, I don't think—

DOTTIE. Well, I should hope you don't. In the first place, *why* should I be jealous of Irene and you?

GORDON. I'm sure I don't know.

DOTTIE. The whole things so *silly*. I'm not jealous of anyone. I've got a boy-friend of my own already.

GORDON. That so? You told me the other day you hadn't.

DOTTIE. Well, I have. You don't think I've told you everything?

GORDON. No, certainly not. As a matter of fact, Dottie, I'm rather glad it turned out this way. Because—

HARRY. (*Enters c. from L.*) Hello, hello! Well, I guess you heard what happened?

GORDON. Hello, Mr. Moore! Yes, we heard.

HARRY. (*Excitedly; has a newspaper which he unrolls and points to*) See what it says in the paper? Here, you read it, Dottie. (*Extends the paper to her.*)

DOTTIE. I'm sorry, Dad; I can't. (*Rises*) I—excuse me! (*Turns and runs out c. to R.*)

HARRY. Why—what's wrong with her?

GORDON. I—don't know, Mr. Moore.

HARRY. Eat something that didn't agree with her? Here, you read it, Gordon.

GORDON. (*Takes the paper from him*) Right! ..

HARRY. (*Crosses and puts his coat on the console table. Calls*) Edna!

EDNA. (*Offstage*) Yes! That you, Harry?

HARRY. (*Calls*) Come down here and listen what it says in the paper! (*Crosses back down*) That's an extra—they got out a special edition. That's the first time they did that since way back when Roosevelt was elected—the first time.

EDNA. (*Enters c. from R.*) What do you want, Harry?

HARRY. Listen, Gordon's gonna read what it says in the extra. Go ahead, Gordon.

GORDON. (*Reads*) "At an early hour this evening, it seemed assured that Harrisville's next Mayor would be Harry Moore, genial druggist. With only one ward, the Eighth, still to be heard from, Moore had what appeared to be a commanding lead over Charley Foster. Mr. Foster, when asked for a statement, refused to concede Moore's election. He said, 'I cannot believe that the people of Harrisville could make the awful mistake of electing as Mayor that—' "

HARRY. (*Quickly*) That's enough! The rest aint important.

GORDON. (*Smiles; hands him back the paper*) Well, this looks like it. Congraulations, Mr. Moore!

EDNA. (*Anxiously*) It's not official yet, is it?

HARRY. No, but it will be.

EDNA. Yes, that's what I'm afraid of.

HARRY. Huh?

EDNA. Oh, nothing—you wouldn't understand.

HARRY. Well—it was a hard fight, but I saved the town from geting in the clutches of that rat.

EDNA. I hope they appreciate it.

HARRY. Oh, they will. They know what a rat that rat is.

GORDON. Say—if you don't mind my speaking of business at a time like this, Mr. Moore—

HARRY. No, no, certainly not. What's on your mind, boy?

GORDON. Well—my job here's pretty well done, I think—

HARRY. It is?

GORDON. (*Nods*) And I don't think there's any particular need for secrecy at this point. I'm going to recommend to my father that he offer you the agency for the Daniels Chain in Harrisville.

HARRY. (*Pleased*) Well—that's fine! Did you hear that, Edna?

EDNA. Yes, I heard.

HARRY. I guess this is our lucky day. I get elected Mayor—and get offered the Daniels agency—

GORDON. Of course, it depends on how Dad acts on my recommendation—

HARRY. Sure, sure! I understand.

GORDON. And there's only one thing that might stand in the way—

HARRY. Oh—one thing?

GORDON. Yes. I got a letter from New York this morning, and it seems there's someone else in Harrisville who's interested in obtaining our agency.

HARRY. Somebody else?

GORDON. (*Nods*) Any idea who it might be?

HARRY. No, don't you know?

GORDON. As a matter of fact, I don't. Dad doesn't either. Whoever it is, they're acting under cover—handling it through a broker.

HARRY. Well, the dirty—!

EDNA. (*Quickly*) Harry!

HARRY. But—did you hear that, Edna? Some double-crossing so-and-so is trying to knife me in the back—steal the agency out from under my nose.

GORDON. I wouldn't worry about it too much, Mr. Moore. My report says there isn't a better drugstore in town than yours.

HARRY. Of course there aint. (*Muses*) But I wish I knew who the sneaking little rat is that's trying to do this to me.

IRENE. (*Enters c. from R; dressed for the street*) Hello! Oh, Uncle Harry! I hear you're to be Harrisville's next Mayor.

HARRY. Yeah, looks that way.

IRENE. (*Superciliously*) How perfectly charming! I'm really too, too thrilled.

HARRY. (*Mimicking her*) "Perfectly charming!" "Too, too thrilled!" What've you got to be thrilled about?

EDNA. Harry!

IRENE. Well, really! I'm only trying to congratulate you, Uncle Harry.

HARRY. Okay! If you wanna congratulate me, just say "Congratulations." That's enough.

EDNA. (*A forced laugh*) Ha, ha! You mustn't pay any attention to him, Irene. He's only joking. (*Glares at him.*)

IRENE. Of course! Are you ready, Gordon?

GORDON. I guess so.

EDNA. Oh—are you two going somewhere?

IRENE. Yes, Gordon preciously offered to take me to Bridgebury—to the dance there.

HARRY. (*Makes a face*) "Preciously offered—"

EDNA. (*Quickly*) Well—I hope you have a nice time.

IRENE. Thanks! I'm sure we shall.

EDNA. If there's a dance in Bridgebury, I wonder why Dottie isn't going.

GORDON. (*A little worried*) If you can persuade her, Mrs. Moore, I'd like her to—

IRENE. (*Cuts him off*) She has a headache or something, and doesn't want to come. And, really, Gordon—if we don't want to be late—

GORDON. (*Reluctantly*) All right. I'm ready.

IRENE. Ta ta, Aunt Edna! Ta ta—Mayor!

(*Laughs, takes GORDON's arm, and they exit c. to L.*)

EDNA. (*Waits till they are out of earshot*) Harry! You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

HARRY. I ought to be ashamed? I?

EDNA. Yes—insulting Irene that way. What'll she think?

HARRY. I've been *hoping* she'd think she ought to get out of here—but no such luck.

EDNA. She's our guest, and that's no way to treat her.

HARRY. She's a lah-de-dah, insincere little snob, and I got no use for her—no use at all. Besides, I brought Gordon to this house thinking he and Dottie would be friends. Instead that little snip glues herself to him like a fly to flypaper.

EDNA. Yes, she certainly has cut Dottie out with him—I'll grant you that.

HARRY. Just when I was feeling so good, too, about showing up that rat next door. There's always something to take the joy out of life.

EDNA. Harry—do you *have* to be Mayor?

HARRY. What do you mean, do I have to be Mayor?

EDNA. I mean—couldn't you resign or something?

HARRY. What's the matter with you? You got pains in the head?

EDNA. No—I know what I'm talking about.

HARRY. I doubt that. After I put in a tough cam-

paign and beat out that two-timing double crosser next door, you want me to throw it all away and resign?

EDNA. Yes—I think it might be better for you—and for everybody else.

HARRY. (*Snorts*) You must be getting weak in the head. I'm not gonna resign—not me. Anyway, not till I pass a couple o' ordinances I been thinking about—

EDNA. Ordinances?

HARRY. Yeah—pertaining to shoe stores! (*Rubs his hands together in gleeful anticipation*) I'll make him wish he never started this fight.

EDNA. That's just what I mean.

HARRY. Huh? What's what you mean?

EDNA. (*Shakes her head*) I guess it's no use.

HARRY.. If you had any idea you could get me to resign, you're dang right it's no use. I'm gonna get a little fun out of being Mayor. (*Muses*) But I'd *still* like to know who's trying to cut my throat with the Daniels Drug Chain.

SALLY. (*Enters R.*) Where is he?

EDNA. Sally, did you get all the supper dishes done?

SALLY. Yes, Mom—everyone of them. (*Looks around*) Where is he?

EDNA. Where is who?

SALLY. Gordon, of course.

EDNA. Oh! He and your Cousin Irene went to a dance at Bridgebury.

SALLY. He went out—with Irene?

EDNA. Yes.

SALLY. (*Tragically*) He did a thing like that to me—?

EDNA. (*Puzzled*) What are you talking about?

SALLY. Mom—this is important. Are you sure he went with Irene?

EDNA. Of course I'm sure. They walked out the door together not five minutes ago.

SALLY. But—you're sure they were together? Maybe they just happened to go out at the same time.

HARRY. What is this—a quiz program? Your mother

told you they went to the dance at Bridgebury. That's enough.

SALLY. I can't believe it—I just can't believe it. I can't believe he would be as weak as that.

HARRY. Edna, she had a good dose of castor oil lately?

SALLY. Castor oil? Oh, Dad! How can you speak like that at a time like this—?

HARRY. Huh?

SALLY. You're cruel. All the world is so cruel. (*With a tragic sigh*) I think I shall retire. I shall go someplace where I can be alone. Maybe high on some windy hill—

HARRY. And maybe in some straight-jacket, if you don't stop acting like that. What's the matter with you, anyway?

SALLY. (*Shakes her head*) You wouldn't understand, Dad. Nobody understands—but me. (*Crosses to arch*) That's about the only thing that's left—a high, windy hill, where I can be alone—with my sorrows. (*Exits C. to R.*)

HARRY. (*Who has watched her open-mouthed*) Say, what the—! What's got into her, Edna?

EDNA. Search me!

HARRY. I'm worried. She seems to be losing her mind. *Everybody* in this family seems to be losing their minds—but me.

EDNA. I don't think it's that bad. She's at that age, you know—and she's got some funny ideas.

HARRY. Funny ideas? *That's* an understatement.

EDNA. It's your young man—your Gordon. Ever since he came here, he's had the whole house topsy-turvy. Between him and the election—

HARRY. Well, the election's over. And you heard what he said about the business. Maybe we can have a little sanity here from now on.

EDNA. I hope so.

HARRY. I'm hungry.

EDNA. Don't tell me you haven't had your supper yet?

HARRY. (*Shakes his head*) Not a bite.

EDNA. (*Sighs*) If that aint just like you—just when I get the dishes done. Why didn't you eat?

HARRY. I got interested in the election returns and forgot to. Rustle me up a sandwich or something, will you?

EDNA. Rustle you up? What do you think I am, a cowboy? (*Crosses to door R.*) Well, come on in the kitchen and I'll see what I can find.

DOTTIE. (*Enters C. from R., looking downcast*) Have they gone already, Mom?

EDNA. Irene and Gordon? Yes, they went a little while ago.

DOTTIE. Oh! (*Sighs dolorously.*)

HARRY. What's the matter here? You all as though you'd just buried your best friend.

EDNA. Never mind! Come on, Harry—if you want anything to eat.

HARRY. (*Crossing to door R.*) I think I'll move to the morgue. Some of the corpses there have smiles on their faces. (*Exits R., followed by EDNA*)

(DOTTIE sighs, crosses and sits in divan with the newspaper, which she looks at uninterestedly. After a moment, a WHISTLING signal is heard from offstage L., as in Act One. She gets to her feet, looks around apprehensively, then crosses and opens French doors.)

PETE. (*Appears at French doors*) Hello, Dottie!

DOTTIE. (*Fearfully*) Sshh! (*Looks around*) Pete! Dad and Mom are right inside—in the kitchen.

PETE. I know. I was watching and saw them go out of the room.

DOTTIE. F'heavens sakes! You shouldn't take such chances.

PETE. I had to see you, Dottie.

DOTTIE. Why?

(They are talking in low voices.)

PETE. Gosh, I haven't seen you in *days*. And I wanted to ask you something.

DOTTIE. What?

PETE. I wanted to ask you to go out with me tonight.

DOTTIE. *(Shakes her head)* I don't think so, Pete. Not tonight.

PETE. Why not?

DOTTIE. I don't know. I just don't feel like it.

PETE. But, look—they're having a swell dance at the hotel in Bridgebury. We could have lots of fun.

DOTTIE. Bridgebury? Is that where you want to go. *(Pete nods)* No, that's out—definitely!

PETE. Why, what's the matter with Bridgebury?

DOTTIE. It's out, and I just don't want to discuss it, Pete.

PETE. Well—okay—if you feel that way about it. *(Slight pause)* What's the matter, Dottie?

DOTTIE. What do you mean?

PETE. You've been acting awfully funny the last few days.

DOTTIE. Have I?

PETE. Yes, you have. What's the matter?

DOTTIE. *(Looks at him for a moment; shakes her head)* Nothing—nothing at all.

PETE. *(Frowns, troubled)* Is it—that fellow who's been staying here?

DOTTIE. Who? You mean Gordon Daniels? *(He nods)* Certainly not. That's ridiculous. Whatever gave you an idea like that?

PETE. The last few days—ever since he came—you've been—sort of—different.

DOTTIE. *(Looks away)* No, I haven't.

PETE. Yes, you have, Dottie. You can't hide it from me. I know you too well.

DOTTIE. (*Evasively*) I don't know what you mean, Pete.

PETE. Did you—go and fall for him, Dottie? (*She shakes her head*) But you—you've changed your mind about—us. Haven't you?

DOTTIE. (*Miserably*) I—I don't know, Pete. I guess I'm all mixed up.

PETE. Uh-huh! (*Slight pause*) He's a pretty nice fellow, I guess.

DOTTIE. Yes.

PETE. And I guess he thinks you're all right, too.

DOTTIE. (*Bitterly*) Me? He doesn't even know I'm alive.

PETE. Oh, so that's what it is.

DOTTIE. Pete, don't ask me to explain any more. Don't even talk to me. Just—just leave me alone for a few days and—maybe I'll be all right.

PETE. Leave you alone? That's easy enough to say. But—gosh, Dottie—a fellow likes to know where he stands.

DOTTIE. You're sweet, Pete. And I'd like things to be the way they have been—

PETE. But they aren't?

DOTTIE. Well— (*TELEPHONE rings*) Oh, Pete! That's the phone—

PETE. Uh-huh!

DOTTIE. You'll have to get out of here—

PETE. All right—

DOTTIE. Hurry! Before they see you! (*Pushes him.*)

PETE. Dottie, I've got to talk to you some more—

DOTTIE. Later!

EDNA. (*Calling from offstage as the TELEPHONE continues to ring*) Dottie! Answer the phone!

DOTTIE. (*Calls*) Yes, Mom! Pete! (*Motions frantically for him to go.*)

PETE. Walk down to the corner in about a half hour and I'll meet you there?

DOTTIE. All right, all right! But please go now.

PETE. Okay! I'll see you then. (*Exits through French doors.*)

DOTTIE. (*Crosses and answers telephone*) Hello—Yes— No, he's busy now—

EDNA. (*Enters and stands in door R.*) Who is it?

DOTTIE. (*Holds her hand over receiver*) It's for Dad. (*Into phone*) What?—Oh, yes, I will—Thank you, I'll tell him that— Yes— Yes— You're welcome— Goodbye! (*Hangs up.*)

EDNA. What did they want, Dottie?

DOTTIE. It was the *Star* office—

HARRY. (*Enters R., wiping his lips on a napkin*) The *Star* office—on the telephone?

DOTTIE. Yes, Dad. They wanted to congratulate you on your election as Associate Mayor.

HARRY. Oh! Well, it's very nice of them to— (*Double take*) Huh? What's that you said?

DOTTIE. I said they wanted to congratulate you on your election as Associate Mayor.

HARRY. *Associate* Mayor?

DOTTIE. Yes.

HARRY. What the heck do they mean by that? Associate Mayor—never heard of such a thing—

EDNA. Dottie must've misunderstood them. They probably said "Mayor."

DOTTIE. No, Mom—I remember distinctly. Associate Mayor—that's just what the man said.

HARRY. We'll soon find out. (*Crosses, picks up telephone and dial a number. Short wait*) Hello, *Star*?—Give me Sam Collins. (*Pause*) Hello, Sam?—Harry Moore— Yeah— Now, wait a minute; what did you say?—Associate Mayor—?

DOTTIE. See?

HARRY. No—no, I haven't heard— *What?* Well, for—! (*Great consternation.*)

EDNA. What? What is it, Harry?

HARRY. Sshh! (*In telephone*) Huh?—The Eighth Ward!—That's the official count?—No, I'll be hanged if I will! With *him*?—That dirty, no-good—? What?

—Oh—okay, Sam, you call me back if there's anything new— Yeah— So long! (*Hangs up*) Of all the things that could have happened to me, this is the worst.

EDNA. (*Impatiently*) Will you *please* tell me what it's all about, Harry?

HARRY. According to Sam Collins, the returns from the Eighth Ward wiped out my lead—

EDNA. You mean—Charley Foster was elected?

HARRY. No—we both were!

EDNA. *What?*

HARRY. That's right—we were both elected.

EDNA. But—I don't understand. How could you both have been elected? One of you *had* to have more votes than the other.

HARRY. That's just it—we didn't. It was a *tie*!

EDNA. Oh!

DOTTIE. F'heavens sakes!

HARRY. And now Sam says—according to the City Charter—we gotta serve together—as Associate Mayors.

EDNA. My land! Did you ever hear of such a thing?

HARRY. (*Pacing back and forth distractedly*) Well, I won't do it—I just won't do it—

EDNA. But you'll have to, Harry—if that's what the Charter says.

HARRY. It was a plot—he bought those votes—he must've—that's the only way he could've got that many.

DOTTIE. But, Dad, isn't there a possibility that there was a mistake. Maybe if they count the votes again they'll come out differently.

HARRY. Sam says they were checked twice, and it's official. (*Paces; to himself*) Sure, that's what he did—I'll bet he did— *bought* the election! What do you think of a blankety-dang thief who'll stoop to a trick like that—?

CHARLEY. (*Off*) Where is he?

(*Bursts in through French doors, closely followed by*
KATE.)

KATE. Now, Charley—be careful!

CHARLEY. Ha—there he is—the faker!

HARRY. (*Simultaneously with above speech*) Here he is now—the cheap crook!

CHARLEY. (*Advancing menacingly on HARRY*) You bribed the election officials, did you?

HARRY. (*At the same time; advancing to meet him*) You bought the votes, did you?

EDNA. Harry!

KATE, Charley!

CHARLEY. Listen, you pin-headed little runt! I've taken a lot from you in my time, but this is the limit—the absolute limit!

HARRY. (*Belligerently*) Oh, yeah?

CHARLEY. Yeah!

HARRY. Then why don't you fight like a man?

CHARLEY. I will! (*Peels off his coat.*)

HARRY. This is the chance I been waiting for ten years— (*Peels off his coat.*)

KATE. Charley! What are you doing?

DOTTIE. Dad, don't be absurd!

HARRY. Stand out of the way—

CHARLEY. Yeah, stand out of the way, you women—if you don't wanna get hurt.

EDNA. Harry, I won't—I won't let you make a fool of yourself—

CHARLEY. You're too late, by forty-five years.

HARRY. Look out, Edna—I'm gonna show that rat-faced double-crosser—once and for all. (*Pushes EDNA out of the way*) Now put up your hands and take your medicine, rat! (*Put up his fists in a fighter's stance.*)

CHARLEY. (*Puts his fists up*) Say your prayers, runt—you're gonna get what's coming to you.

DOTTIE. Mom! Can't you do something to stop them?

EDNA. What can I do?

KATE. Oh, dear, oh, dear!

(HARRY. and CHARLEY are circling around each other, keeping a careful distance apart.)

PETE. (*Bursts in through French doors*) Dad!

CHARLEY. Now, it's no use, Pete. Don't try to stop me—

PETE. Stop you? I don't care about stopping you. But you'd better come quick—

CHARLEY. Not till I get finished with this little—

PETE. You'd better—the house is on fire!

CHARLEY. I'll come when I— *What?* Whose house?

PETE. Ours!

KATE. My heavens! (*Looks out French doors*) It is Charley! Look—you can see the flames from here! Oh, dear, dear! Come on! (*Runs out.*)

CHARLEY. (*Rushing to French doors*) Pete, put the alarm in.

PETE. I did.

CHARLEY. Then come on!

(*They dash out through French doors.*)

DOTTIE. (*At doors, looking out*) F'heavens sakes!

HARRY. It was a trick—that's what it was—so he wouldn't have to fight.

DOTTIE. Trick, nothing! Just look at that flame—that's no trick.

EDNA. (*At doors*) My land! I wonder how it started. I hope *this* house doesn't catch.

DOTTIE. I don't think it will, Mom. There's no wind, and with the driveway in between, I think we'll be safe.

EDNA. I hope so. (*Peers out*) The fire truck better get here soon, or there'll be nothing left of that house.

DOTTIE. Come on, Mom—maybe we can help. (*Runs out through French doors.*)

HARRY. No—Edna, don't *you* go.

EDNA. Why not?

HARRY. We don't owe them any help. If it was *our* house on fire, I bet they wouldn't do a thing—except maybe laugh.

EDNA. Well, I'm going.

HARRY. No, Edna—I don't want you helping them.

EDNA. My land, I'm not gonna *help*—I'm just gonna *look*. (*Exits through French doors.*)

HARRY. Hey—wait! (*She is gone*) I'll be blank-danged!

SALLY. (*Excitedly, off*) Mom! Dad! (*Runs in c. from R.*) Dad! There's a f—

HARRY. Yeah, there's a fire next door at the Foster's. So what?

SALLY. Come on—let's see it!

HARRY. No, you don't! (*Catches hold of her arm*) I'll keep *one* member of this family from making a blank fool of herself.

SALLY. What's the matter, Dad? Why can't I go?

HARRY. Because it's their own dang fire and they can keep it. I don't want any part of it.

SALLY. I know, but, Dad—

HARRY. And don't give me any of your back talk. I'm sick and tired of everybody in this house walking all over me.

SALLY. Walking over you? Huh!

HARRY. You'll stay right here, where you belong. It's their fire—let them make the most of it.

SALLY. (*Crosses and looks out through French doors*) Gee! It's a beauty.

HARRY. It only goes to show you.

SALLY. Goes to show you what?

HARRY. That people just get what are coming to them. So let that be a lesson to you, Sally.

SALLY. You think *everybody* gets what's coming to him?

HARRY. Sure, every last one.

SALLY. Maybe I'll forget about that high windy hill, then. Maybe I'll just stay here and watch him suffer—

EDNA. (*Enters through French doors*) Harry, it's awful—

HARRY. It's no more than they deserve.

EDNA. Maybe you're gonna be mad at me what I did.

HARRY. Huh? What did you do?

EDNA. (*Nervously*) But it was the only human thing I *could* do. After all, they are human beings—just like you and me—aren't they?

HARRY. Frankly—no!

EDNA. Well, that's what I thought. I said to myself—they're just human beings, like Harry and me, and—Oh, dear!

HARRY. (*Impatiently*) What? What are you talking about?

EDNA. Well—you see, Harry—now, don't be mad, but I—(*Shakes her head*) No, I haven't got the nerve to tell you.

HARRY. (*Exasperated*) Don't stand there gibbering like that, Edna. Let me know the worst.

EDNA. All right. Harry, I asked them to—

DOTTIE. (*Enters through French doors*) Just bring it right in here, Pete.

PETE. (*Offstage*) Okay! (*Enters, carrying a pile of clothing, luggage, hat boxes, etc.*)

HARRY. Hey—!

EDNA. Harry!

PETE. Gee! This is nice of you, Mr. Moore—

HARRY. What is?

PETE. Letting us stay here tonight, till we can find someplace to go. (*Dumps the things on the floor up L.*)

HARRY. But—wait a minute—you listen to me—

PETE. Sorry, I gotta go back and get another load—while I can still get inside. Excuse me! (*Hurries out through French doors.*)

HARRY. (*Accusingly to EDNA*) So—*that's* what you were trying to tell me.

EDNA. (*Meekly*) Yes, Harry.

HARRY. (*Incredulously*) You told them they could stay here—in my house?

EDNA. Yes, Harry—just for tonight.

HARRY. (*Exploding*) Well, of all the blank-dang, nit-wit things to do—!

EDNA. Now, Harry—

HARRY. I won't have 'em! Do you hear me, Edna? I won't have 'em. You invited them—now you can just dis-invite them—

DOTTIE. Dad—why can't you be magnanimous for once?

HARRY. *Magnanimous?* After what I've suffered at their hands?

DOTTIE. What have you suffered?

HARRY. Why, I've— Huh?

DOTTIE. Just that—what have you suffered? I'll bet you can't tell me now what your fight with Mr. Foster was about in the first place.

HARRY. Who can't? It was about—uh—uh—I mean, it all started when that no-good blankety-blank said—did—tried to—ah—um— (*Hesitates.*)

DOTTIE. Well, I'm waiting.

HARRY. Never mind how it started. It's none of your business.

DOTTIE. See! (*WARN Curtain.*)

HARRY. He's persecuted me— He's hounded me— He stole the election from me. And you want me to be magnanimous?

KATE. (*Offstage*) Can we come in?

DOTTIE. Yes, come in.

CHARLEY. (*Enters through French doors with KATE. They are BOTH carrying large heaps of luggage*) Tell that squirt I'm only consenting to stay in this dump under protest.

HARRY. (*To EDNA*) Tell him as far as I'm concerned, he doesn't have to protest at all. He can get out right now.

EDNA. Harry!

KATE. Charley!

(*CHARLEY and KATE dump their luggage on the floor.*)

EDNA. (*To HARRY.*) Be human, Harry. Don't forget they're our guests.

(SALLY picks up a letter which has been dropped on the floor by CHARLEY.)

HARRY. I won't forget it—not a chance in the world.

CHARLEY. (To KATE) Tell him, one more word out of him, and we'll go.

HARRY. (To EDNA) Tell him the word is "fine"!

CHARLEY. Oh, is that so—?

SALLY. (Who has been looking at the letter) Dad, here's something from the Daniels Drug Chain—I found it on the floor. Is it yours?

HARRY. (Takes the letter) Huh?

CHARLEY. (Suddenly realizing) Hey! Gimme that! (Makes a lunge for it)

HARRY. (Holds it away from him and reads it. Turns on him) So! It was you— I might've known—

CHARLEY. Gimme my letter! (Snatches it from him.)

HARRY. You're the double-crosser who's trying to get the agency away from me. I might've known!

(They stand glaring at each other.)

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

THE TIME: *The following morning.*

THE PLACE: *The same.*

AT RISE: IRENE is discovered alone on stage. She is at a console table, speaking into the telephone.

IRENE. (*Into telephone*) Hello, Operator, I've been trying to get long distance— New York— What?— This is Irene Bates, at— Oh, you've got my party?— Yes, all right. (*Pause*) Hello, Mama.—Yes, darling— Oh. I'm all right, I suppose—having a dull time, as usual. Except last night. I went to a dance with a boy named Gordon Daniels— Yes, he's a dear, and he's been giving me the most *terrific* rush— Oh, there was a fire last night, and so our neighbors are staying with us— Yes— Yes, I think their name is Foster, and they're too frightfully plebian—

EDNA. (*Opens door R. and stands in doorway*) Irene—

IRENE. Oh, just a minute, Mama. (*Puts a hand over receiver*) Yes, Aunt Edna?

EDNA. You'll have to hurry if you want breakfast. We're almost finished.

IRENE. All right, I'll be right in.

EDNA. You better or the coffee'll be cold. (*Exits R.*)

IRENE. (*Into telephone*) Hello, Mama— I've got to go in and have my breakfast— What?— Oh, I don't think I'll be coming home for some time yet— Yes, I know I said I wanted to, but that was before I got to know Gordon—

CHARLEY. (*Enters R.*) Hello! (*Looks around, picks up newspaper from desk and settles himself in divan with it.*)

IRENE. (*Into telephone*) Well, Mama, I'll really have to say goodbye— Yes, I will— I'll stay unless things get dull again— All right— Ta ta, Mama! (*Hangs up.*)

CHARLEY. (*As IRENE crosses down. Holds up the paper for her*) See that?

IRENE. (*Looking at it over his shoulder*) Why, it's a picture of you, isn't it.

CHARLEY. Yep!

IRENE. (*Reads*) "Harrisville's new Associate Mayor"—

CHARLEY. Right! And lucky for the people, half their mayor has his heart in the right place.

SALLY. (*Enters R.*) Did he go yet?

IRENE. (*With a superior smile*) By "he" I suppose you mean Gordon?

SALLY. Uh-huh!

IRENE. Yes, he just left, dear—and seemed in an awful hurry. Business, he said.

SALLY. Oh!

IRENE. Well, excuse me. (*Crosses R.*) I can never get used to you people having breakfast at such an unearthly hour.

CHARLEY. (*Looks at his watch*) Yeah, it is late.

IRENE. Late? It's practically the middle of the night. So uncivilized! (*Exits R.*)

SALLY. (*Sighs*) Mr. Foster, do you know of a good, high hill around here that's not being used?

CHARLEY. A hill?

SALLY. Uh-huh! Preferably one that's good and windy.

CHARLEY. Oh, if it's wind you're looking for, you you don't have to leave this house—not with your father here. Ha, ha!

SALLY. (*Shakes her head sadly*) You don't understand. Nobody understands.

PETE. (*Enters through French doors*) Hello, Dad. Hi, Sally! I've just been looking at the house.

CHARLEY. Is that where you went to?

PETE. Yeah; and, boy, it certainly is a shambles.

CHARLEY. I don't even want to see it again. It pains me.

PETE. Thank God for insurance companies, hey, Dad?

CHARLEY. You said it! I been paying out on that policy for years. Now I'll get a little something in return.

PETE. Yeah! Uh— (*Trying to be casual*) Isn't Dottie around, Sally?

SALLY. She's helping Mom and your Mother with breakfast.

PETE. Oh!

CHARLEY. You see my picture in the paper, Pete?

PETE. (*Looks at it*) Pretty good! And say, Dad, that reminds me—now that the Moores have been so nice to us—letting us use their house like this—I guess you're finding out that Mr. Moore isn't such a bad guy after all.

CHARLEY. Oh, that's what you think, is it?

PETE. Sure! And, personally, I think this is a good time for you and him to make up.

CHARLEY. (*Dangerously*) H'mm! Any more opinions you'd like to express?

PETE. No, Dad—that's all.

CHARLEY. Then listen to me, you unwiped whipper-snapper—staying here has only confirmed my opinion of that whining little baboon—

PETE. (*Glancing apprehensively toward R.*) Now, Dad—

CHARLEY. I only agreed to do it so you and your mother could be comfortable, so don't try any of your shenanigans on me. Trying to catch me when I'm not looking, huh? Trying to take advantage of my good nature and make me make up with him, huh?

PETE. Okay, Dad. If that's the way you feel about it—

CHARLEY. It is!

PETE. I thought, after this, you might see reason—but I guess I was wrong.

CHARLEY. You certainly were. And I don't want to hear any more about it— (*Rattles the paper and starts to look at it*) My own son, acting like a traitor—that's gratitude.

SALLY. Pete, do *you* know of any nice high hills?

PETE. You looking for one?

SALLY. Uh-huh!

PETE. Well, let me know if you find it. I'll climb up it with you.

SALLY. Oh, no, that wouldn't be right. You'll have to find your own hill. I'm going to climb up mine alone.

CHARLEY. (*Annoyed*) I wish you'd climb out of here—and let me read this paper in peace.

PETE. Dad! It's her house, you know.

CHARLEY. I don't care whose house it is. I started out to read this paper, and by dang, I'm gonna do it or bust.

SALLY. That's all right, Pete. I'm used to being treated like that. I don't expect *anyone* to ever understand me. (*Crosses to arch, full of her tragedy*) I guess Fate must've meant me to go through life all alone—just me and my sorrows. (*Sighs heavily and exits c. to R.*)

PETE. Now see what you've done to that poor kid, Dad.

CHARLEY. Huh! She's nuts—just like all the other Moores, she's nuts.

PETE. It's—uh—it's taking them a long time in there, isn't it?

CHARLEY. What's that to you?

PETE. Nothing! But—I guess I'll just go in and get another cup of coffee. (*Crosses and exits R.* CHARLEY reads the paper in silence for a few moments.)

EDNA. (*After a short wait, enters R. She has a dust cloth. With a cold smile*) Excuse me.

CHARLEY. H'mph!

EDNA. I've got to dust up in here.

CHARLEY. H'mph!

EDNA. (*Proceeds to dust the furniture*) Nice warm morning, isn't it?

CHARLEY. (*Without looking up from the paper*) Yeah.

EDNA. (*After another pause during which she dusts*) Guess there's not much left of your house, is there?

CHARLEY. No.

EDNA. (*Again a pause*) It's a lucky thing you saved what you did from it.

CHARLEY. Look, if you're trying to make conversation on my account, you don't have to.

EDNA. (*Indignantly*) Well! I must say—

CHARLEY. No, you mustn't. Don't say anything. We'll both be happier that way.

EDNA. Well, of all—!

HARRY. (*Enters R. Looks from one to the other*) What's the matter?

EDNA. (*With a toss of her head*) Nothing!

HARRY. Has that rat-faced bully been annoying you?

EDNA. (*Resumes her dusting*) No—no, it's all right.

HARRY. You just tell me if he has— I wouldn't put a think like that past him— I wouldn't put it past him at all.

(*CHARLEY decides to give him the silent treatment; the expression on his face shows that he is above such petty things.*)

EDNA. I told you it was all right, Harry.

HARRY. Well— Where's my paper? (*Looks around for it. CHARLEY rustles the pages*) Hey! Edna—tell him I want my paper. (*CHARLEY turns a page unconcernedly. Shouts*) Did you hear me, Edna? I want it!

EDNA. Yes, I heard you, and so did the people on the next block.

HARRY. Well, hang it all, it's my paper isn't it? I had to give up my room—they eat our food—and now I can't even read my own paper. What am I, anyway?

CHARLEY. Don't tell him—he won't like it.

HARRY. Most moochers are at least polite. But no—not him—that would be too much to expect.

CHARLEY. Ho-hum! Not much news in the paper.
(*Puts it down on divan.*)

EDNA. There it is—there's your paper.

HARRY. I see it. I see it.

CHARLEY. (*Rubs his chin*) Guess I'll go up and shave. (*Rises.*)

HARRY. (*To EDNA*) Tell him he can't use my razor—tell him I'm particular.

CHARLEY. Tell him I'd use it if I *wasn't*.

HARRY. And tell him not to stay in that bathroom all morning. Tell him he's not the only one in this house that wants to shave.

CHARLEY. Tell him I'm the only one that's man enough to shave.

HARRY. And tell him I was sap enough to allow him and his family to stay here last night, but they gotta get out before tonight. Tell him one night was enough.

CHARLEY. Tell him, far as I'm concerned, one night was too much. (*Exits C. to R.*)

HARRY. I certainly let you and Dottie talk me into something last night.

EDNA. (*Sighs wearily*) Oh, Harry! Why don't you relax for five minutes?

HARRY. How can I—with that whole dang family getting under foot all the time?

EDNA. You've got to make the best of it.

HARRY. I suppose you think they're the salt of the earth.

EDNA. No, I don't. I think they're hateful. I don't like them one whit better than you do. But they're here—and we have to put up with them.

HARRY. They *wouldn't* be here, and I *wouldn't* have to put up with them if it wasn't for that dang fool idea of yours to invite them.

EDNA. (*Sighs*) Harry, let's not go through it again.

HARRY. We wouldn't be going through it in the first place, if it wasn't for you. Every time I think of it, I burn up—

EDNA. You're telling me?

HARRY. After the things he's done to me all these years—and then to top it all, the way he's tried to cut my throat with Daniels—

EDNA. But, Harry—you can't really blame him for that—

HARRY. (*Unable to believe his ears*) Can't blame him for it?

EDNA. The way he explained it last night—it was just a business proposition with him. He's been thinking of going into the drug business, he said, for years—

HARRY. He's been thinking of stabbing me in the back for years. You mean to say you actually *fell* for that cock-and-bull story—

EDNA. Well, the way he explained it—

HARRY. What's this world coming to—when a man's own wife conspires with his enemies to ruin him? What's this world coming to?

EDNA. Oh, don't be silly, Harry.

HARRY. All right, all right! I give up. What's the use of fighting any more, if my own wife and family are against me.

EDNA. (*Shakes her head helplessly*) There's your paper, that you were making so much fuss about before.

HARRY. I got fifth columnists in my own home—

EDNA. I said, there's your paper.

HARRY. I see it. Agent provocateurs—

EDNA. Well, you were making such a fuss about it before. Why don't you read it?

HARRY. Because I don't want to. Now you're trying to make me read a paper against my will, huh?

EDNA. Against your *will*? After the fuss you made—?

HARRY. The next thing, you won't let me in at all. You'll lock me out, I suppose—

EDNA. Now—

HARRY. Locked out of my own house—that's a fine how-do-you-do! You—you—Quisling! (*He has worked himself up to the point where he firmly believes he is a wronged martyr.*)

KATE. (*Enters R.*) Can I help?

HARRY. What's this world coming to? When a man can't even get into his own home? What's it coming to? (*Exits C. to R.*)

(*EDNA shakes her head helplessly and resumes her dusting.*)

KATE. Can't I help you clean up?

EDNA. No, thanks!

KATE. I feel I ought to do something—after what you people did for us.

EDNA. (*Coldly*) That's not necessary, thank you.

KATE. Well— You needn't be so uppity, I'm sure. I was only trying to help.

EDNA. When I need your help, I'll ask for it. Haven't you done enough already?

KATE. (*Indignantly*) I? Haven't I done enough?

EDNA. Yes! That's what I said.

KATE. Will you kindly tell me what you're talking about—if you know.

EDNA. Gladly! You've practically broken up our happy home, that's what you've done.

KATE. And just how did I do that, pray?

EDNA. By coming here and doing your best to come between Harry and me.

KATE. (*Gasps*) Oh! You must be crazy— I actually think you must be.

EDNA. Well! That's a fine thing to say to *me*. If it weren't for me, you'd be out on the cold streets freezing to death this very minute.

KATE. In the first place, the streets aren't cold—they're hot—

EDNA. Well—then you'd be roasting to death.

KATE. And in the second place, if it weren't for you,

we'd be in some nice, comfortable hotel instead of this—this madhouse.

EDNA. Oh, so you don't like it?

KATE. I most certainly do not.

EDNA. Then what are you doing here?

KATE. What am I doing here? You and your snooty daughter invited us, and I was fool enough to think you meant it.

EDNA. My daughter is *not* snooty.

KATE. She is, too!

EDNA. (*They get more and more heated*) I'd rather have a snooty daughter than a stupid son.

KATE. If you're talking about Pete, he's smarter than anyone in your family.

EDNA. Huh! Anyone can call *names*. And I thank Heaven for one thing—that *I'm* not married to Charley Foster.

KATE. What's the matter with him?

EDNA. I certainly don't have to tell you that at this late date.

KATE. I wouldn't give you Charley for *six* like your crackpot of a husband.

EDNA. Oh, is that so?

KATE. Yes, that's so!

EDNA. If you think we're all so awful here, *why* don't you just leave?

KATE. That's exactly what I'm going to do.

EDNA. Go ahead!

KATE. All right—I will. (*Marches angrily toward arch.*)

EDNA. (*Suddenly*) No—wait!

KATE. (*Stops at arch*) Wait for what? More insults?

EDNA. I've just been thinking—aren't we stupid?

KATE. If you're speaking for yourself—yes.

EDNA. The things we said to each other—and *why*? (*Begins to laugh.*)

KATE. Why? Well—uh—because—

EDNA. You see—there's no reason— (*Laughs*) No reason at all—is there? (*Laughs.*)

KATE. No, it's just that you said such—such hateful things— (*Grudgingly begins to laugh.*)

EDNA. And the way you answered me—it was a caution! (*Laughs harder and harder.*)

KATE. Goodness— I didn't want to fight— (*Laughs.*)

EDNA. Neither did I. (*Laughs*) I don't hate you—

KATE. And I certainly don't hate you—

(*Their laughter rises to a crescendo.*)

EDNA. (*Wiping her eyes*) My land!

KATE. I haven't laughed so much in years.

EDNA. We were just like two little schoolgirls—

KATE. I know— "My father can lick your father."

EDNA. That's right. I don't know what got into me.

KATE. I don't know what got into me, neither.

EDNA. I guess it's the influence of our dear husbands.

KATE. I guess it is. We ought to be ashamed of ourselves.

EDNA. We certainly should. What are we going to do about it?

KATE. (*Shakes her head*) I don't know.

EDNA. Are we going to let them make us go on fighting like cats and dogs when we've really got nothing to fight about?

KATE. I don't want to.

EDNA. It's high time they came to their senses.

KATE. I agree. But what can we do?

EDNA. We can put our foot down.

KATE. If I put my foot down, Charley'll only step on it.

EDNA. Yes, and then blame *you* for having it there in the first place.

KATE. Exactly!

EDNA. But—there must be something we can do. After all, are we mice or women?

KATE. (*Sighs*) I'm a mouse.

EDNA. I am, too. But we're going to stop being mice—

KATE. Are we?

EDNA. Yes! Kate, will you back me up in anything I do?

KATE. If it will stop all the foolishness between our men, and give me a little peace in my own house—yes.

EDNA. All right. Now, we've got to map out a plan of campaign.

KATE. Maybe we could go on a sit-down strike?

EDNA. (*Considers*) Yes, we could refuse to cook any more meals for them until they agreed to make it up.

KATE. Uh-huh! And leave the house dirty, and not make their beds.

EDNA. But—suppose they cooked their own meals—?

KATE. And got a hired girl to do the dirty work. (*Shakes her head*) I guess we'll have to think of something better than that.

EDNA. Let's think.

KATE. All right.

(They stand in deep thought for a moment.)

EDNA. Kate! I think I have it—

KATE. You have, Edna?

EDNA. Yes, and this is something that should work, because it'll hit them where it hurts the most.

KATE. Where's that?

EDNA. In their pocketbooks, of course!

KATE. Of course!

EDNA. And I think it'll work, if we can get the co-operation of one person.

KATE. Who?

EDNA. Well, first of all, we've got to—

DOTTIE. (*Enters R. with PETE*) The dishes are all done, Mom.

EDNA. Are they?

DOTTIE. Uh-huh! All except Irene's, and she's still sitting at the table.

EDNA. All right, thanks, Dottie. Kate, do you want to come with me, and I'll tell you all about it?

KATE. Yes, come on, Edna.

(They exit together, c. to R. PETE and DOTTIE look at each other, surprised.)

PETE. Did you see what I saw?

DOTTIE. I think so.

PETE. Gosh! It doesn't seem possible, does it?

DOTTIE. Maybe what we always hoped for is finally happening, Pete. Maybe the families are actually getting together.

PETE. Do you think so?

DOTTIE. Well, it looks that way, doesn't it?

PETE. Yeah, but I was speaking to Dad just a while ago, and he's acting worse than ever.

DOTTIE. Well, with our mothers apparently on such good terms, it's a start, anyway.

PETE. Uh-huh! It's what we've been trying to do for so long. But now—I guess it doesn't matter much, any more.

DOTTIE. Why not?

PETE. Well— We always wanted them to get together so we could tell them of our engagement, didn't we?

DOTTIE. Yes.

PETE. And now— *(Looks at her longingly)* I guess there's nothing much to tell them. *(She walks away from him, to French doors)* Is there?

DOTTIE. I—guess not.

PETE. *(Slight pause)* Where is Gordon?

DOTTIE. He went out on business—early this morning.

PETE. Are things—still the same between you and him?

DOTTIE. *(Nods)* Still the same.

PETE. I wish there were something I could do for you, Dottie. But I guess it's your problem.

DOTTIE. I guess it is.

PETE. You—you like him very much, don't you?

DOTTIE. (*Hesitates*) I—I don't know whether I do or not, Pete. It's all—so mixed up.

PETE. Poor kid.

DOTTIE. Sometimes I think I do, and other times I'm not sure, and—oh, Pete! Pete! (*Starts to sob.*)

PETE. Dottie! (*Goes to her*) Dottie! Don't! (*Takes her in his arms and comforts her*) Don't do that, Dottie.

DOTTIE. (*Between sobs*) I'm—sorry!

PETE. Gee, I hate to see you cry, Dottie. I wish there was something I could do— I only wish there was.

DOTTIE. You're swell, Pete—and kind—and—you ought to forget about me, because you're too good for me—you're much too good for me.

PETE. Don't say that—

DOTTIE. Well, it's true.

PETE. No, it's not. I'm not too good for you— I'm not good enough. And even if I wanted to forget you— I couldn't. Never!

DOTTIE. Pete! (*The tears come again.*)

PETE. Hey, will you cut that out? Aw, Dottie—

IRENE. (*Enters R. Smiles when she sees what's going on*) Dear me! I seem to have walked in on something.

PETE. (*Lets go of DOTTIE*) Oh—uh—hello!

IRENE. I'm so sorry to intrude.

DOTTIE. Oh, you're not intruding, Irene. You're— Oh! (*Sobbing, turns and runs out through French doors.*)

PETE. Hey, Dottie! Wait a minute! (*Runs out after her.*)

(*IRENE laughs scornfully, stretches and yawns, crosses down and curls up comfortably on the divan.*)

GORDON. (*After a moment, enters C. from L.*) Hello!

IRENE. Why, Gordon! Where have you been?

GORDON. Very, very busy!

IRENE. Oh, then you must be tired. Come here and sit down. (*Makes room for him on divan.*)

GORDON. Thanks! (*Sits with her*) How are the friendly enemies this morning?

IRENE. From the noises I've heard around the house, they're more enemies than friendly.

GORDON. (*Smiles*) Then propinquity wasn't such a good cure.

IRENE. Not in this case. But let's not talk about them—let's talk about us.

GORDON. I'm willing.

IRENE. When are you going back to New York, Gordon?

GORDON. Well—as a matter of fact—it may be even sooner than I expected. Maybe today.

IRENE. *Today?*

GORDON. (*Nods*) Depending on a long-distance call I've sort of been expecting. If I get it in time, I may be able to make the afternoon train.

IRENE. (*Frowns*) That's too bad.

GORDON. Yes, I'll rather regret leaving. But my business here is practically finished, and there's no further reason why I should stay.

IRENE. (*Reflectively*) Isn't there? All that stuffy business—about the drugstore or whatever it is—that's all finished.

GORDON. (*Nods*) We've decided to give the agency to your uncle.

IRENE. (*In a bored voice*) How perfectly ducky! But—you say you'll be taking the afternoon train?

GORDON. Probably.

IRENE. (*Muses*) H'mm! Maybe I could make it, too—

GORDON. You?

IRENE. Yes, I don't see why not. After all— (*Smiles at him*) My business here is finished, too.

GORDON. (*Looks at her for a moment*) I don't get it.

IRENE. No, I don't suppose you do. Well—never mind. We'll have fun in New York, won't we.

GORDON. Oh—ah— (*Hesitates.*)

IRENE. Well, won't we?

GORDON. (*Rises*) Look here, Irene, there's something you should know. Something that's been on my mind for some time—

IRENE. Dear me! You sound like a true confession, Gordon.

GORDON. That's what it amounts to, practically. I'm afraid you've got the wrong idea about me, Irene. It's probably my own fault for letting things go on the way they have, but—

EDNA. (*Enters c. from R. with KATE*) Oh—there he is now!

KATE. How lucky!

GORDON. Hello, Mrs. Moore! How are you, Mrs. Foster?

KATE. Fine, thank you! And you're just the man we want to see.

GORDON. I?

EDNA. Yes. We want to ask you to do us a favor.

GORDON. Oh—why, certainly! Anything at all I can do. You know that, Mrs. Moore—

CHARLEY. (*Enters c. from R. Rubs his face*) Look what I've done.

KATE. Oh, have you shaved, Charley?

CHARLEY. Shaved? My face feels as though I'd blasted. And it's no wonder. That bathroom's so dark, I might as well have shaved by the Braille system.

EDNA. (*Smiles sweetly*) Oh, don't you like our bathroom, Mr. Foster?

CHARLEY. Confidentially, it stinks!

EDNA. I'm *so* sorry.

CHARLEY. Your being sorry won't put back those nicks I took out of my face.

EDNA. That's quite true, it won't, and I'm *so* sorry—

CHARLEY. (*Suspicious at her manner*) Huh?

EDNA. Would you mind coming in here with us for a minute, Gordon? (*She and KATE cross to door R.*)

GORDON. Of course! (*Crosses to them.*)

CHARLEY. Wait a minute! Kate—where are you going with that—*woman*?

KATE. We have a little business to attend to. You don't mind, do you, dear?

CHARLEY. You and *her*? I certainly do mind—

KATE. I'm so sorry!

CHARLEY. (*Annoyed*) What is this? Everybody's so sorry—I tell you, look out for her, Kate—she's slippery.

KATE. Slippery? But I'm not gonna *handle* her—I'm just gonna *talk* to her. Come along, Edna.

EDNA. Yes, come, Gordon.

(*The THREE of them exit R.*)

CHARLEY. (*Worried*) What's going on around here—(*Paces; to IRENE*) Do you know?

IRENE. No.

CHARLEY. She's gonna get into trouble with that woman—you mark my words.

IRENE. Trouble? But they seemed so friendly.

CHARLEY. Sure! That's just what I'm worried about. They're too *dang* friendly.

IRENE. Well, it's nothing that concerns me, I'm sure. (*Rises*) I think I'll go upstairs and pack—

HARRY. (*Enters C. from R.*) Where's Edna?

IRENE. She's in there having a conference with Gordon and Mrs. Foster.

HARRY. A conference?

IRENE. Yes. (*Crosses to arch*) Excuse me, won't you?

HARRY. With pleasure.

(*IRENE exits C. to R.*)

CHARLEY. (*He and HARRY eye each other from opposite sides of the stage. After a moment*) If there were somebody else here, I'd tell 'em to tell you something.

HARRY. And if there were somebody else here, I'd tell 'em to answer you.

CHARLEY. (*Hesitates for a moment; then takes the plunge*) Look here, squirt—I'm gonna talk to you—

HARRY. What makes you think I'll listen, rat?

CHARLEY. I'm gonna talk to you come Hades or high water, because there's something you gotta know. But don't think, just because I do, I've stopped hating you for even one moment.

HARRY. The day you stop hating me I'll get worried about myself.

CHARLEY. Okay! As long as you know where I stand. Listen, our old women are up to something.

HARRY. What do you mean?

CHARLEY. I don't know what it is, but they're up to something. I came in here just now, and they were as thick as thieves—

HARRY. Edna? Thick as thieves with your fathead of a wife? I don't believe it. It's a plot—you're trying to catch me in your trap.

CHARLEY. I tell you they were as thick as thieves. And that aint all. You heard what that little stinker of a niece of yours said. They went out into the kitchen with Daniels. All three of them are putting their heads together right this minute.

HARRY. About what?

CHARLEY. I don't know, but I got a hunch it's got something to do with us.

HARRY. So what?

CHARLEY. They're probably hatching some kind of scheme to make us get together—

HARRY. It won't work.

CHARLEY. You know women; they're clever as fiends when they get started.

HARRY. They could be as clever as a bundle of fiends, and still they couldn't get me to make up with you.

CHARLEY. Okay, squirt. But don't say I didn't warn you.

HARRY. I won't, rat. And, before we stop talking, when you getting out of my house?

CHARLEY. Just as soon as I can get my family and my things together. You don't think I'd stay one minute longer than nec—?

(EDNA enters R. with KATE and GORDON.)

EDNA. Well, here they are—both together.

KATE. Yes, Edna. That's fortunate, isn't it, dear?

HARRY. "Dear"? What's the meaning of this, Edna?

CHARLEY. See, squirt? You wouldn't listen to me.

HARRY. I wanna know what's the meaning of this.

EDNA. You're about to find out. Gordon has something to say to you—both of you.

HARRY. Gordon?

KATE. Yes! Go ahead and tell them, Gordon.

GORDON. All right—

HARRY. Listen, boy, what've they done to you? Has that vampire got you in her clutches?

GORDON. (*Laughs*) No, I don't think so, Mr. Moore. But I want to talk to you— (*Takes stage c.*) On business.

HARRY. Business? But that's between you and me—what've all these people got to do with our business?

GORDON. Quite a little, as you'll see. Mrs. Moore and Mrs. Foster have been giving me some very good advice—

HARRY. (*Sensing trouble*) Now, wait, boy—you don't want to listen to them—mere women—

CHARLEY. Sure, you don't wanna listen to them—

GORDON. (*Pretending surprise*) What? You two actually in agreement?

CHARLEY. Certainly! Even a dope like him could agree to that.

GORDON. But you don't even know what their advice was

CHARLEY. We can imagine.

GORDON. All right. Here's what the Daniels Drug Chain has decided to do. We're going to open our own outlet here in Harrisville.

HARRY and CHARLEY. (*Together*) What!

GORDON. That's it, gentlemen: we've decided to open our own store.

HARRY. (*Sputters*) But—but—you can't do a thing like that!

CHARLEY. What's the matter with *me* opening it? I know Harrisville.

HARRY. And I've already got the store—

GORDON. There's something in what each of you says. But I'm afraid that's our decision. (*Pauses*) Unless—

HARRY. Unless what?

CHARLEY. Yeah, unless what?

GORDON. Well, there's one alternative. But I'm afraid you wouldn't be interested.

HARRY. What is it?

CHARLEY. Tell us.

GORDON. Very well. Mr. Moore, you want the Daniels agency for your store, don't you?

HARRY. (*Impatiently*) You know I do.

GORDON. And, Mr. Foster, you're willing to build a new store to get the agency, aren't you?

CHARLEY. That's right.

GORDON. The alternative is this: The Daniels Chain won't give the agency to either one of you—but we'll give it to you both.

CHARLEY. Huh?

HARRY. Make sense, boy! Not one—both—what d'you mean?

GORDON. Just what I said. You can have the agency together—as partners!

HARRY. *Partners?*

CHARLEY. *Partners?*

HARRY. Me and that rat?

CHARLEY. The squirt and I?

GORDON. (*Smiles*) That's my proposition, gentlemen. Take it or leave it.

HARRY. (*Accusingly, to EDNA*) This was *your* idea.

EDNA. Yes!

KATE. And it was a very good one.

CHARLEY. You wouldn't listen to me, squirt.

GORDON. (*Looks at his watch*) Come, gentlemen. I'm in rather a hurry. Will you take it or leave it?

HARRY. I'll leave it.

CHARLEY. You're dang tootin'!

GORDON. (*Shrugs*) Suit yourself. (*Starts for arch.*)

HARRY and CHARLEY. (*Together*) Wait!

GORDON. (*Stops*) Do you wish to say something to me?

HARRY. (*He and CHARLEY glare at each other*) I guess he's got us, rat.

CHARLEY. It looks that way, squirt.

HARRY. You're the last person in the world I ever thought would be my partner.

CHARLEY. I never counted on it in my worst nightmares.

HARRY. Associate Mayors—business partners—I've seen everything now.

CHARLEY. We may be partners—but that don't mean I have to stop hating him. Nobody can make me do that.

KATE. Oh, yes—somebody can.

CHARLEY. Huh?

KATE. (*To GORDON*) You forgot the other part of the agreement.

EDNA. Tell them, Gordon.

GORDON. Oh, yes. There'll be another clause in the contract, gentlemen: there are to be no fights between you. If that clause is ever violated, the agency may be taken away from you.

HARRY. What've our fights got to do with you?

GORDON. It's smart business, Mr. Moore, to have the managers of our agency on cordial terms.

CHARLEY. How'll you know whether we fight or not?

GORDON. We've thought of that. Mrs. Moore and

Mrs. Foster are to judge. The Daniels Chain will accept their word as final in the matter.

EDNA. And that means if you ever fight again—

KATE. If you so much as raise your voices to each other—

EDNA. The agency will be taken away from you.

GORDON. That's correct.

CHARLEY. Boy, that's certainly rubbing it in—

HARRY. You take *all* the joy out of life.

GORDON. You don't have to accept the agency, you know. It's up to you.

IRENE. (*Enters C. from R.*) Do you know yet whether you can make the afternoon train, Gordon?

GORDON. Why—not yet, Irene— (*TELEPHONE rings*) But I wouldn't be surprised if that call was for me. I may know in a minute. May I answer it, Mrs. Moore?

EDNA. Certainly!

GORDON. (*Crosses and picks up telephone*) Hello— Long distance?—Yes, this is Gordon Daniels—New York? All right, I'll hold on— (*Puts hand over telephone*) It's for me. (*Into telephone*) Hello— Yes, hello, darling!—When did you get back?—Oh, have a nice trip?—That's good!— *Tomorrow?* (*Overjoyed*) Do I *want* to?—You just try to keep me from it!—It's all right now with your mother?—That's wonderful!— Yes, I'm leaving this afternoon— I'll call you the minute I get in— All right, then I won't keep you any longer in that case— Goodbye, dear! (*Hangs up.*)

EDNA. You look as though you'd just got some good news, Gordon.

GORDON. The best news in the world! That call was from my fiancée—

IRENE. (*Startled*) Your *fiancée*?

GORDON. Yes, she just got in from a South American cruise. And she's finally persuaded her mother to accept me as a son-in-law, so—we're being married tomorrow!

IRENE. Oh— Oh! (*Turns and runs out C. to R.*)

GORDON. Why—what's the matter with her?

EDNA. She seemed a little upset at your news. But congratulations, Gordon!

(The OTHERS ad-lib congratulations.)

GORDON. Thanks! Thanks, all of you! If I'm to make the afternoon train, I'll have to pack in a hurry. Well, I hope you two gentlemen will be very successful as our co-agents in Harrisville. You *have* decided to be co-agents haven't you? *(HARRY and CHARLEY glare daggers at each other; GORDON smiles)* I take your silence to mean assent. Well, I'll see you all later. You'll excuse me now, won't you? *(Turns and exits c. to R.)*

(WARN Curtain.)

HARRY. Well! Of all the mean, low-down curs to have as a partner—

CHARLEY. I'd rather be in business with a coyote—

KATE. Charley!

EDNA. Harry!

KATE. Remember the clause about fighting—

EDNA. If you don't want the agency taken away from you before you even start—

CHARLEY. Who's fighting?

HARRY. We're not fighting—

CHARLEY. See? I haven't even raised my voice. But—*(Faces HARRY with a set smile on his face)* I can still tell this snake-eyed little punk what I think of him.

HARRY. *(With the same kind of smile)* There's nothing in the agreement to prevent me from telling my esteemed partner that he's a horse's ear—

PETE. *(Runs in through French doors with DOTTIE)* Dad—

CHARLEY. What? There's more than one way of skinning a cat—

DOTTIE. *(She and PETE look very happy)* Dad—

HARRY. What do you want? Maybe this arrangement isn't gonna be so bad, after all. I'll have plenty of opportunities to tell this pancake-puss where he gets off—

PETE. Will you listen to us, Dad—?

CHARLEY. Sure! Yes, sir! More than one way of skinning a cat—or a jackass, for that matter—

DOTTIE. F'heavens sakes! Will you let *us* talk? We're going to be married!

(KATE and EDNA *gasp in astonishment.*)

CHARLEY. Is that so? This is gonna be a pretty good partnership—pretty good—

HARRY. Married, hey? Dang right, it'll be a good partnership—for one of us— (*The Curtain begins to fall*) And I don't mean that rat-faced, no-good, thieving, low-down sake-in-the-grass—

THE CURTAIN IS DOWN

THE PEOPLE NEXT DOOR

PROPERTY PLOT

Furnishings:

Console table.
Wall mirror.
Hand telephone.
2 upholstered straight chairs.
Flat-top desk.
Desk chair.
Waste basket.
Oblong table.
Divan.
Coffee table.
2 armchairs.
2 end-tables.
2 table lamps.
2 floor lamps.
Small radio.
Rug.
Drapes.
Books.
Pictures.
Vases.
Ash-trays.
Bric-a-brac.

Hand Properties:

Act I:

Newspaper (Dottie).
Dish towel (Edna).
Letter for Dottie (on desk).
Book for Sally (on shelf).

PROPERTY PLOT

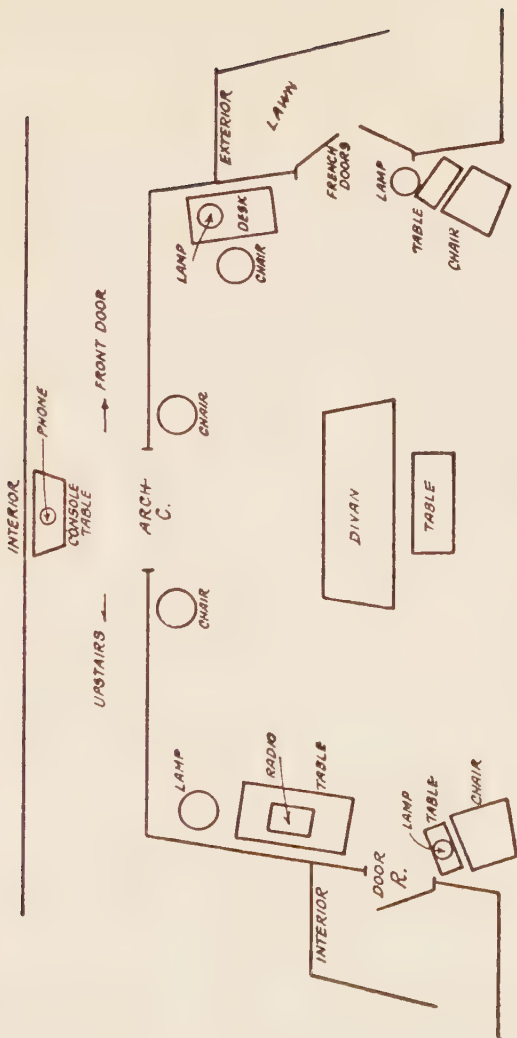
Photograph (in book).
Watch (Harry).
Briefcase (Harry).
Sheets of paper (in briefcase).
Pencil (Harry).
Twig of vine (Charley).
Twig of vine (Harry).
Suitcase (Gordon).

Act II:

Dish towel (Edna).
Newspaper (Harry).
Napkin (Harry).
Clothing (Pete).
Luggage (Charley).
Hatboxes (Pete).
Luggage Charley).
Luggage (Kate).
Letter (Charley).

Act III:

Newspaper for Charley (on desk).
Watch (Charley).
Dust cloth (Edna).
Handkerchief (Edna).
Watch (Gordon).



SCENE DESIGN
 "THE PEOPLE NEXT DOOR"

WISDOM TEETH

Comedy. 1 act. By Rachel Field. 1 male, 3 females.
Interior. Modern costumes. 15 minutes.

A gay episode dealing with dentists and their patients. A shy young hero accompanies an eccentric relative to the dentist, where he meets a very pretty young girl. From a discussion of wisdom teeth the young couple drift to matters of more romantic importance and the outcome is both humorous and satisfactory.

(Royalty, \$5.00.) Price, 40 cents.

THE LONDONDERRY AIR

Comedy. 1 act. By Rachel Field. 2 males, 2 females.
Interior. New England costumes (1800). 35 minutes.

A charming character play laid in New England a hundred years ago. The author of *Three Pills in a Bottle* has woven a very pretty romantic story in this new play.

(Royalty, \$5.00.) Price, 40 cents.

THE PATCHWORK QUILT

Fantasy. 1 act. By Rachel Field. 2 males, 4 females, 1 child. Interior. Modern and old-fashioned costumes. 30 minutes.

A touching little play, centering around an old woman's love for her patchwork quilt, every colored square of which holds for her a memory. By means of these squares the audience is given a glimpse into the past and her youthful courtship and marriage.

(Royalty, \$5.00.) Price, 40 cents.

THREE PILLS IN A BOTTLE

Fantasy. 1 act. By Rachel Field. 4 males, 3 females, 1 child. Interior. Fantastic costumes. 30 minutes.

A little sick boy from his window makes friends with passers-by. Each allows his soul to visit the child. The audience is shown how strangely souls may differ from the human beings to whom they belong. Pathos, gaiety, and wistfulness are combined with a big theme.

(Royalty, \$5.00.) Price, 40 cents.

